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THE TABLE-TALK OF JESUS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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LONDON: HODDER AND STOUGHTON

27 PATERNOSTER ROW

THE

TABLE-TALK OF JESUS

AND OTHER ADDRESSES

BY THE REV.

GEORGE JACKSON, B.A.

LONDON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

27 PATERNOSTER ROW

MDCCCXCVI

TO

MY WIFE

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE kindly welcome given by an indulgent press and public to my *First Things First*—six thousand copies having been sold within two years—has encouraged the preparation of this succeeding volume. As in the former case all the addresses contained in the present volume have—with one exception [1]—been delivered in the course of my ordinary ministry. A few have already appeared in various magazines and papers; the rest are printed now for the first time.

I have no wish to excuse literary imperfections, of which no one can be more conscious than I am, but I may be allowed to state, that though these addresses have been entirely re-written since their delivery, they remain addresses still; the re-

[1] That entitled *The Missionary Motive.*

writing, like the original preparation, has taken place with an imaginary audience before me, and the language of direct address has, without hesitation, been maintained throughout.

More gratifying even than the kindly press notices of my earlier volume have been the assurances received again and again of its practical usefulness to many engaged like myself in Christian work—to lay-preachers, class-leaders, leaders of adult Bible-classes, and many others of my own and sister Churches. For this new volume I can desire nothing better than that it may repeat, in this respect, the experience of its predecessor.

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THE TABLE-TALK OF JESUS

I

THE TABLE-TALK OF JESUS

"*He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on a Sabbath to eat bread.*"—LUKE xiv. 1.

IT was the Sabbath day, and a certain wealthy Pharisee had invited Jesus to make one of a number of guests at his table. The motive that prompted the invitation was probably a mixed one; nevertheless, it was accepted, and that day the Pharisee and his friends heard such a plain, searching bit of table-talk as probably they had never listened to before. "When He went into the house," we read, "they were watching Him." They did not know it, but He also was watching them—with what results they learned before the meal was over.

I

To understand the first incident it is necessary to bear in mind the difference between Eastern

and Western modes of life. "The Englishman's house is his castle" is a sentiment that is wholly unknown in the Oriental world. "The universal prevalence of the law of hospitality—the first of Eastern virtues—almost forces the Oriental to live with open doors, and any one at any time may have access to his rooms."[1] It is not, therefore, surprising to read that after Jesus had entered the house, "Behold, there was before Him a certain man who had the dropsy." Probably his presence was not an accident. We are told, in an earlier chapter, that the scribes and Pharisees were "laying wait for Him, to catch something out of His mouth," and it would seem as if this sick man's appearance just now was part of a pre-arranged plot. So, at least, it seems to have been understood by Jesus. He "answering, spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees"; but they had said nothing. He has read their unspoken thoughts, and it is to these He makes answer.

Was there any bound to the heartlessness of these men? We are indignant if we hear of a surgeon experimenting on sick helplessness in a hospital, but what shall we say of these who are ready to make of a suffering man their tool, a stick with which to strike at Christ, and afterwards to be flung aside when their miserable purpose is accomplished? See how Christ puts them all to shame. "Is it lawful," He asked them, "to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they held their

[1] Farrar's *Life of Christ.*

peace. Then He took the sick man and healed him, and let him go. Then once more He turned to his persecutors: "Which of you shall have a son or even an ox fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on a Sabbath day?" But again they were silent: "they could not answer unto these things." So, for the sixth time, does Christ vindicate God's thoughts of the Sabbath against those who were making into a curse what He meant for a blessing.

Thus once more are we brought face to face with one of those grave practical difficulties which are always with us. The question of "Sabbath observance" has again reached an acute stage in our city.[1] Our fathers had pretty definite ideas about these matters; their creed was a very simple one, and they were rarely troubled as we are to know "where to draw the line." For good or for ill that day is wholly past. It is not possible, even if it were desirable, for us to lay upon our children the yoke which some of our fathers laid upon us. And the peril of our position is this, that while the old theory of life is gone, we have as yet no other to take its place; with the inevitable consequence that at the present moment there is a tendency to relaxation all round, of which these discussions on the question of "Sunday golf" are our latest illustration.

[1] The reference is to the subject of "Sunday golf," which was exciting considerable attention in Edinburgh at the time when this address was delivered.

It is worthy of note that those who take what is called "the broad view" in these matters, often make their appeal to Christ, whom they claim as on their side. But now, let us see. It is, of course, true that Christ was in constant conflict with the professional defenders of the sacred day, that He treated with absolute disregard the senseless restrictions with which they had fenced it about. Yet He never blamed them for observing the day as holy, for marking it off as different from other days; He condemned them because what God meant for a boon they had made into a burden. "The Sabbath was made for man," He said; but that does not mean "for man to do as he likes with," as glib quoters of the words often seem to imply. Those who wish to make the Day of Rest a day of pleasure-seeking may be able to give good reasons for what they do, but they must not quote Jesus. It is a fact significant of much, that on five out of the six occasions when Christ came into conflict with the Pharisees on the question of Sabbath observance, what He contends for is the right, not of self-indulgence, but of self-sacrifice, the right to minister to the necessities of others.

And, therefore, if I am asked to vote for "Sunday golf" I for one must decline. I do not want any revival of obsolete and impossible legislation interfering with the liberties of individuals. If the members of a private golf club choose to make use of their course on a Sunday,

that is no business of mine. But when it is proposed to open the public links, that is another matter. Of course, if the majority demand it sooner or later they will get it; but meanwhile I claim my right as a citizen to use any little influence I may have in dissuading them from what I am convinced would prove ultimately to be an unwise step.

I appeal to you, working men, in whose supposed behalf proposals of this kind are generally made. Many of you are greatly interested in movements for shortening the hours of labour: take care that you do not undo with one hand what you are doing with the other. A wide and rapid extension of the provision for public amusement will inevitably mean in the long run more work for those who have already too much work to do. After Sunday golf will come Sunday trains and Sunday trams and Sunday omnibuses; but the men to drive them will not be the men who to-day are clamouring in the newspapers for the links to be open seven days a week. I protest I am no lean and sour-faced Puritan; I want no impossible ideal; a certain amount of Sunday labour is inevitable, but he is no true friend of the working man who does not seek to keep it at a minimum.

The Sabbath is not a tax levied on man's time by the Great Overseer of human life; it is a merciful provision for his need. Its perpetual obligation is based not so much upon an ancient

statute given to Moses, but rather upon the perpetual necessities of man, for which that statute made early and wise provision. We may disregard those necessities, we may give up to idle frivolity and pleasure-seeking what God meant for the deepening and strengthening of all that is greatest in our natures, but it will be to reap a retribution not less certain because it is no longer proclaimed amid the thunders and lightnings of Sinai.

II

The healing of the man with the dropsy we may suppose to have taken place before the meal began; what follows would occur during its progress.

The next words of Jesus were spoken "to them that were bidden" — to the guests. He had marked how "they were picking out for themselves" the chief seats; and when they were seated, He read them a brief lesson in politeness and courtesy. "When thou art bidden of any man to a marriage feast," He said, "sit not down in the chief seat, but when thou art bidden go and sit down in the lowest place." Then, as was His wont, His words struck deeper, and the root of all this unseemly striving for precedence He laid bare in their self-asserting pride: "Everyone that exalted himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The particular form of Christ's rebuke may have lost its force for us to-day; nevertheless His lesson in politeness and courtesy is by no means antiquated. I venture to think that, speaking generally, Christian people do not attach anything like due importance, anything like the importance which the New Testament attaches, to what may be called the "minor moralities" of life. We are rightly anxious that a man should "believe and be saved," but we are not anxious as we ought to be concerning the things which a saved man should "add to" his "faith." A man—a Christian man, I mean—may be rude, ill-mannered, boorish, but we are all ready with excuses for him; these are his "failings," we say, and we think of them as we think of the hump on the camel's back—very ungainly, no doubt, but then the creature was made so! According to one of Tennyson's biographers, when a lady once appealed to him to explain a certain passage in one of his poems which she had failed to understand, the poet replied as follows: "Dear madam, I merely supply poetry to the English people—not brains;" concerning which the biographer remarks, "His friends always understood that the rough manner concealed a genuine geniality." But what is the worth, one would like to know, of a "geniality," however "genuine," that is "concealed" after that fashion? Has not Tennyson himself taught us —

> "Manners are not idle, but the fruit
> Of noble nature, and of loyal mind?"

To my thinking such a letter was positively brutal.

Are there not many Christian homes where Christ's lesson is still needed? Mrs. Waule (in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*) used to think "that entire freedom from the necessity of behaving agreeably was included in the Almighty's intentions about families." We have all of us, probably, met with people of that kind. I have known young men who were the pink of courtesy to every young lady of their acquaintance, except when that young lady happened to be their own sister. Let us be sure of this: our religion has a very great deal yet to do for us if it allows us to keep all our winning ways and kindly attentions for the house of a stranger, and to drop them the moment we set foot on our own threshold.

While I am speaking on this subject, may I refer to another matter? I was greatly delighted a little time ago to see that a distinguished Glasgow minister, Dr. Hunter, had the courage to speak out on the question of public smoking. I am not a smoker; neither am I an anti-smoker; I can enjoy a good cigar any time, always provided another man smokes it. But while I have not a syllable to say against those who choose to smoke in private, I entirely agree with Dr. Hunter in condemning the discourtesy of multitudes who smoke in public. "I question," he said, "whether a smoker can go the length of a single street without annoying some one," and probably never a

day passes in our city but scores of persons of both sexes suffer the greatest discomfort, because some thoughtless fellow seats himself in the front of a 'bus or tramcar, and lets the wind blow his dirty smoke and ashes into the faces of his unhappy fellow-passengers behind him.

Now, perhaps, some of you are inclined to be offended, and you are beginning to wonder if the preacher has forgotten that it is Sunday evening and that we are in church. Well, but religion ought to have something to say to us about matters of this kind—and it *has*, if we would only listen to it. An old English poet calls Jesus, "the first true gentleman that ever breathed." The best manual of true politeness that I know is the New Testament. "A Christian," says Julius Hare, "is God Almighty's gentleman." What Christ cared for is surely worth our caring for, and if He stopped to rebuke the rudeness of the Pharisee's guests, and Himself always set an example of thoughtful considerateness, ought not courtesy to be more than an idle matter to us who profess to be His followers?

III

From the guests Christ turns to speak to the host. "And He said to him that had bidden Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours . . . But when thou

makest a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; because they have not wherewith to recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just."

Now, before we go further—is this the Christ you believe in? a Christ who enters into your home, who sits down with you at your table and hears you talk; a Christ who comes into your shop, and behind your counter, and looks over your cash-book and ledger—is this your Christ? or have you no dealings with Him except in the synagogue? Then He is not the Christ of these Gospels: "*He went into the house*," and He has somewhat to say unto us when we sit down at table no less than when we sit down in church.

It ought not to be necessary to say that there is nothing in these words of Christ to the Pharisee to forbid that happy social intercourse, the friendly gatherings, and the Christmas parties that add so greatly to the healthy enjoyment of life. An apostle bids us "be given to hospitality;" Jesus Himself was a partaker of such hospitality at the marriage feast of Cana, and when Judas would have checked the lavish outflow of Mary's love, sternly rebuked him. Common-sense is needed to interpret the words of Jesus not less than the words of others.

It may be, indeed, there are some who would find not only no harm, but great good in a literal application of Christ's teaching. When we

remember the time and money that will be wasted in Edinburgh this winter in paying and returning "calls," in dinners of equal dreariness and costliness, which give no real enjoyment to one single soul, which are tolerated by host and guest alike only because that mysterious entity called "society" demands it, one cannot but feel that the literal application is in some cases, perhaps, the most needed. But even for those whose more straitened circumstances will always save them from the temptation of the well-to-do Pharisee of this chapter there is a lesson in Christ's words. We have all need to beware of that subtle selfishness which gives only when it hopes to receive again. And when I speak of "giving," I do not mean simply, or even chiefly, the giving of money or food. Not by material gifts is the spirit of Christ's words always best fulfilled. We have all in our measure gifts of sociality, the power to please, the power to serve. Do not let us lend these out only where they are sure to come back to us with interest. Rather let us seek out the dull and the vacant, the friendless and the forgotten, those who have nothing to give in return; let us give ourselves to these, and verily we shall be blessed, for we shall "be recompensed in the resurrection of the just."

IV

Christ's closing words were prompted by an

observation on the part of one of the guests. This man felt, perhaps, that the conversation was taking a somewhat awkward turn, that it was becoming uncomfortably personal; and therefore he let fall a little pious platitude which did not mean, and was not intended to mean, anything in particular, but which, he hoped, might have the effect of bringing the conversation to an end. "Blessed is he," he said, "that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." It was a bit of sheer cant. "You can see the sanctimonious old hypocrite,' says Dr. Dods, "solemnly shaking his head, and letting the words fall unctuously from his tongue."

Christ's answer was the parable of the Great Supper. An exposition of the parable is not possible just now, but what Christ meant by it was, I think, something like this: "You talk of the blessedness of the kingdom of God, do you think mere talking about it will secure it to you? God calls, but even His call is ineffectual if men do not respond. And how many things there are that make men deaf to the divine voice! For business' sake, for pleasure's sake, for the world's sake, men miss the highest good. You, you, are you seeking the blessedness of which you speak so glibly?"

Do not Christ's words touch some of us? We like to pose as the patrons of religion; we can expatiate warmly on the debt which civilization owes to Christianity; we subscribe a guinea annually to foreign missions; we have even argued

for the Church as by law established, and have written a debating society essay on the superiority of Jesus to Socrates. And yet, really, almost anything for which we care is sufficient to make religion take a second place. Learning calls, and we say "I come"; business calls, and we say "I come"; pleasure calls, and we say "I come"; and God calls, but for Him we have no answer. Do we know what we are missing? Christ likens the kingdom of heaven unto a great feast where God Himself is the host. You thought religion meant giving up the sweets of life for dry and tasteless fare, but Christ says it is a feast. From the husks that the swine do eat, to the light and warmth, the welcome and plenty, of the Father's house—that is Christ's thought of what it is God calls men to.

And that no man may doubt His welcome, the King has sent His servant again this day to say to all, "Come in, for all things are now ready." "I had a seat at the King's table once, and tasted the King's good pleasure, but—fool that I was—I left it; I shut the door upon myself. Will he open to me a second time?" He will, He will: the door is open now; come in, come in. "I have had a glimpse sometimes of the glory within, and I have wished—but, ah! I have no right there; look at my garments, mud-splashed and torn—there is no room there for such as I am." Man from the highways and hedges, the King bids thee enter; come in, come

in. "And I, too, long to enter, and for years have waited, but, alas! my eyes are dark with doubt, and fear has seized fast hold upon me. Sometimes I seem to see all clear, and then the darkness falls again until I wonder if the feast, the proclamation, and the welcome be not all a lie, or if there be any King at all." Thou art one of His poor blinded ones, and He has given His messengers charge concerning thee, that they should be eyes unto thee lest at any time thou miss thy way, and that they should bring thee into His presence. Tarry not, but haste and come; the King keeps for thee the seat next Himself.

"Come, all the world; come, sinner, thou!
All things in Christ are ready now."

THE MOTHER OF JESUS

II

THE MOTHER OF JESUS

"*Is not this . . . the son of Mary?*"—MARK vi. 3.

MY subject this morning is Jesus and His mother. This, I need hardly remind you, is a subject concerning which one branch of the Christian Church—the Roman Catholic—has had a great deal to say. And, as so often happens in these matters, exaggeration on the one hand has led to neglect on the other; and so it has come to pass that we Protestants, for the most part, give the subject the go-by altogether.

It is no part of my present purpose to discuss the various dogmas which, under the fostering hand of Rome, have grown up around this subject—the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception, the Perpetual Virginity, the Miraculous Assumption. This only I will say, that not only (so at least it seems to me) are they without one vestige of scriptural authority, but they are even more, excluded, as though by anticipation, by the whole

character and tenor of every one of the few brief references which the Gospels make to the mother of our Lord. And anyone who has observed, however superficially, religious life on the Continent, and has marked the countless shrines and images and pictures which appeal to the love and the imagination of the devout worshipper of the Virgin, cannot but feel how far in this respect, at least, Roman Christianity has strayed from the simplicity of the New Testament records.

Nevertheless, Romish exaggeration ought not to mean Protestant neglect. Of course, we *do* believe that Jesus was the son of Mary; alike through the "Shorter Catechism" and the "Apostles' Creed" we declare our faith in Him as "born of the Virgin Mary." And yet, so fearful are we of anything that savours of Mariolatry, that though we habitually think and speak of Jesus as "Son of God," we almost as habitually refrain from thinking or speaking of Him as "son of Mary"; and so we miss the truth, the strength, the comfort which God meant should come to us through this name no less than through that other and greater name, "Son of God."

A curious illustration of the unwillingness of multitudes of Protestants to give to Christ this perfectly scriptural title is furnished by Dean Milman's well-known hymn beginning, "When our heads are bowed with woe." As printed in our own Hymn Book the last line of each verse reads, "Jesu, Son of David, hear." What Mil-

man really wrote was, "Gracious Son of Mary, hear." And if anyone is interested enough to turn to Julian's great *Dictionary of Hymnology*, he will find that there are extant at least ten different versions of that last line, every one of which owes its existence to the anxiety of the hymn-doctors to get rid of the obnoxious phrase, "son of Mary." For my part, I am utterly at a loss to understand this strange solicitude. If the New Testament calls Jesus "son of Mary," why should we hesitate? Moreover, see what our refusal robs us of. There are moments when I love to think of Christ as my King: on His head are many crowns; in His hand is the sceptre of the universe; He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and I worship Him throned for ever amid the glory of His Father and of the holy angels. But there are times again —times "when the spirit shrinks with fear"— when I would rather think of Him as "born of a woman," "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."

> "Thou hast bowed the dying head,
> Thou the blood of life hast shed,
> Thou hast filled a mortal bier;"

therefore,

> "When our heads are bowed with woe,
> When our bitter tears o'erflow,
> When we mourn the lost, the dear,"

what more fitting, what more beautiful than that we should pray,

> "Jesu, Son of Mary, hear!"

"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father"—I will sing it to the music of all the trumpets of God. But I will sing this also—"When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man, Thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb." "Is not this the son of Mary?"

Let us think, therefore, for a few moments of Mary the mother and Jesus the son. We will look first at the mother's love for her son, and then at the son's love for His mother.

I

The Mother's love for her son.—The references in the four Gospels, as I have said, are comparatively few, and when we piece them all together they do not amount to much. But their meaning is clear, clear at least to love's eyes, for love is always quick to catch love's meaning.

"She brought forth her first-born son." I wonder, does any mother feel quite the same about any child as she does about her first-born? And Jesus was the first-born child of Mary. And then, the strange and sacred mystery of that motherhood! As far as words can tell it, it is told in those exquisite narratives of the birth and infancy which Luke has preserved for us in the opening chapters of his Gospel. And I sometimes think that Biblical scholarship never made

a happier or a more likely conjecture than when it suggested that these narratives were taken down by the evangelist straight from the lips of Mary herself. Certain it is there are in them delicate little touches that reveal unmistakably the hand of a mother: "And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken unto them by the shepherds"—ay, wondered to-day, and to-morrow had forgotten; "*but Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart.*" So again after the incident in the Temple we read, "And His mother kept all these sayings in her heart."

From this time onward it is only stray glimpses that we get of the Son and the mother together; she is with Him at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee; she goes down with Him to Capernaum; once while He is speaking to the multitude word is brought to Him that His mother and His brethren are on the edge of the crowd seeking to speak with him; we see her last with the disciples in the upper room at Jerusalem waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. But the most beautiful record of all is that which John has preserved for us: "And there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother." There are few things in all the Bible that go to my heart quite like that. While the multitudes were with Him, Mary was content to stand aside and to watch; but now that they have left Him or turned against Him she is by His side; it is her turn now. "Lord, with Thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death; I

will lay down my life for Thy sake." It was not Mary who said that; mothers never talk after that fashion; but when the boastful disciple had denied Him and fled, "there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother."

What a pitiless storm beat about that poor lone woman! What thoughts crowded in upon her poor tired brain! But yesterday He lay a child upon her bosom, and now He is dying—dying before her eyes, yet beyond her reach, dying like a vile and guilty criminal, pinned there to that rough cross of wood like some loathsome vermin. Then she remembered the great words of the angel: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." How often she had said them over to herself when, in the quiet home at Nazareth, year after year had slipped by, till the child had grown from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to youth, from youth to early manhood, and still there was no sign—until sometimes her heart had failed her! Then she would bethink her of Simeon's strange prophecy as he took the little child into his old arms: "Yea, and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul." Many a time had she turned the words over as she lay awake at night; what could it mean, this sword that was to pierce her own soul? Then one day the call

came, and Jesus went forth. "It is coming now," she said, "that promised greatness"; and as day by day she heard how His fame spread and the multitudes thronged Him, and nameless women blessed her that bare Him, the sword was forgotten; once more hope beat high within her. "Surely now, at last," she said, "the promised kingdom is nigh at hand." Then with such awful swiftness all had changed; praise had turned to scorn, and love to hatred; cunning—black, treacherous, horrible—had plotted and had triumphed; and the end of all that promised brightness, of the angel's word, and of her own high hopes, was *here!*—in death, cruel death, death upon a cross! And yet, was He not hers still? It seemed, indeed, as if the earth had opened at her feet and swallowed the hopes of a lifetime. Yet, was He not hers? Had He not moved in her side? Had she not borne Him? Had she not loved Him? Had she not called Him "son"? Had He not called her "mother"? Yes, let come what might come, He was hers; she must be near Him to the last. "There stood by the cross of Jesus His mother."

In all the world is there anything to compare with the constancy, the hopefulness, the patience, the long-suffering of a mother's love? I had got thus far with my sermon preparation when I took down, perhaps for the hundreth time, Mr. Barrie's immortal book *A Window in Thrums*. Of all our modern writers, perhaps, he best understands and can interpret the love and pathos you may

find under the humblest roof. This is how poor Jess mourns for her boy Joey dead this twenty years: "Guid is no word for what Jamie has been to me, but he wasna born till after Joey died. When we got Jamie, Hendry took to whistlin' again at the loom, an' Jamie juist filled Joey's place to him. Ay, but naebody could fill Joey's place to me. It's different to a man. A bairn's no the same to him, but a fell bit o' me was buried in my laddie's grave." Years went by and Hendry and Leeby were laid in the burying-ground, and Jamie, who should have been her stay, was a prodigal in the great city, no one knew where; but Jess still sat at her window and watched the brae. "If he ever comes back, the sacket," said one of the neighbours angrily one day, "we'll show him the door gey quick." "Jess just looked, and all the women knew how she would take Jamie to her arms." "Fiction," do you say? Yes, and it is history too. There is a hymn we sometimes sing, "There is a gate that stands ajar," that I should be inclined to find fault with—for God's gate does not stand "ajar" simply, but wide open—were it not that once I heard that round that simple hymn was twined the story of a mother's love. A girl had strayed from home; every night after she was missing the door was left on the latch. "She may come home to-night," said her mother, "and mother's door must not be shut." I talked once with a little bent old woman in one of our Edinburgh stairs.

I had never even suspected the little tragedy that lay beneath the quiet surface of her life, but that day, somehow or other, it all came out. She, too, had her Jamie: long years ago he went away, no one knew whither; she had heard nothing of him since. And sometimes, she told me, as she sat alone in her room, and heard a sudden step on the stairs, her heart would give a leap: "Perhaps it is he—he's coming home again!"

What Mary's love did for Jesus, how much He owed to it, no one can say. Perhaps the debt was greater than we think. Joseph's probable early death would throw mother and child the more into each other's society. The subject is not free from difficulty; but if Jesus "learned obedience by the things which he suffered," if He "grew in wisdom and in favour with God and man," may not a mother's love bending down over Him in those unfolding years have helped to bring that fair life to its perfect flower and fruit?

Of this, at least, we may be sure—and again I speak not unforgetful of the necessary limitations which the subject imposes—sons like Jesus will be possible only so long as we have mothers like Mary. And therefore it is that I for one, though I am no pessimist, view with eyes full of alarm some of the tendencies in our life to-day. I am not a political economist, nor the son of a political economist, but this I say unhesitatingly, that any system that makes of home only a place to eat and to sleep in, that forces the mother to the mill

or the factory that the little ones may have bread to eat, stands self-condemned. The nation that barters the wealth of its motherhood for silver and gold is letting out its own life-blood. Leave us men, and women who are not mothers, to make money; we need our mothers to make men. I say I am no political economist, but this is what one of the ablest of our living political economists, Professor Marshall, has told us: "The most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings; and of that capital the most precious part is the result of the care and influence of the mother."

Can anything, too, be more saddening than the freedom with which all sorts and conditions of men, and women (and I am sorry that a number of Socialist leaders are amongst them), are advocating theories of marriage which, if they were once adopted, would not only empty the great words "Mother" and "Home" of all their meaning, but—I say it deliberately—would lead society by a short, straight path to the sty? You may find substitutes for some things; you can find no substitute for a good mother. In Professor Drummond's fascinating volume, *The Ascent of Man*, there is a chapter entitled "The Evolution of a Mother." Look at the scale of animal life, he says; at the one end you have the Protozoa, the lowest forms of life; at the other end Mammalia—Mothers. "There the series stops. Nature has never made anything since." "Ask

the zoologist," he says, "what, judging from science alone, Nature aspired to from the first, he could but answer Mammalia—Mothers." Amid all the rubbish of the old Jewish Talmud there is one sentence which ought to be picked out and written in letters of gold: "God could not be everywhere; so He made mothers."

Oh! you mothers, you mothers, let one mother's son speak this word to you. I am not of those who fear to give you what are called "woman's rights." I do not fear—nay, I look confidently forward to—the day when woman shall stand by man's side in all things—in all worthy things, at least—his acknowledged equal; and yet I do sometimes fear lest in grasping at the less you lose the greater. Enter, if you will, the kingdoms of knowledge and power, so unjustly shut against you in the past; but do not, I pray you, forget that there is one kingdom wherein if you do not rule as queens, no man may ever rule as king; there is one sceptre which if you let fall, our hands are powerless to grasp—the sceptre that Mary held, the kingdom wherein Mary ruled, the sceptre and the kingdom of a holy, loving, almighty motherhood.

II

Now, let us turn for one moment to the other side of the subject—*the son's love for the mother.* And if the Gospels have little to tell us of Mary's

love for Jesus, still less do they tell us of His love for her. At the beginning of His life, after the incident in the Temple, we read that He went down to Nazareth with His parents, and was subject unto them; at the end of His life, as He hung dying on the cross, He tenderly committed His mother to the care of the beloved disciple. And this is almost all we know; but if we knew everything we could not be more certain than we are that all was fair and beautiful and good.

It is true that another and an alien note seems sometimes to be struck. Why from the cross did He say, "*Woman*, behold thy son." Why does He not call her "mother"? Why, when she intervenes at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee, does He repel her with what sound like words harsh and stern? Why, when they tell Him that His mother and His brethren are without seeking Him, does He speak as though any might stand as near to Him as even Mary herself? May it not be to remind us—what the New Testament never anywhere allows us to forget—that though Jesus was son of Mary, He was not a son as other sons are? I cannot pursue the subject further now, but if you will think of it, I believe you will find that even in those words of Scripture that men quote oftenest to prove our Lord's humanity there is most inextricably interwoven the surest proof of His divinity.

But, setting this for a moment aside, is it possible to doubt that Christ's thoughtful care for

His mother in dying was but the coming to the surface of a love and tenderness that were always there? The death of Socrates and the death of Jesus have often been compared. But when Xantippe, in her last interview with her husband, before he drank the fatal cup, gives way to her grief, Socrates bids his friends put her away, and then turns to continue calmly his discussion of the philosophy of pleasure and pain. What a contrast with that last scene around the cross!

And to all who have eyes to see, what can be more plain than the tender, sacred regard in which Jesus ever held the filial relationship? To the rich young ruler asking, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He does not repeat all the Ten Commandments, but He does not omit the fifth. No sterner words ever fell from His lips than those in which He condemned the rabbinical conjuring that permitted a man to evade his filial obligations. When He would say how near they stand to Him who do the will of His Father in heaven, this is how He puts it: "The same is My brother and sister and mother." When Luke wrote the story of the raising of the widow's son at Nain, was there not something in the accent, the look, the gesture of Jesus that touched the pen of that evangelist, till it overflowed with words so charged with emotion that even now the voice falters as it reads them: "The only son of his mother, and she was a widow"—did Jesus remember His own widowed mother, I wonder?

And when He bids farewell to His disciples, He says, "I will not leave you—*comfortless*," says the Authorised Version, but that was not what Jesus said: look in the margin of the Revised Version —"I will not leave you *orphans*"; that is Christ's word. To Him there was no state so utterly bereft as orphanhood.

And now remember that He who said these things, the son of Mary, will one day be the Judge of all the sons of men. What then, think you, will He say to them who sin against this, one of God's best gifts to men, a mother's love? Will He recognise them as His?

I knew a young man once, educated at one of our great Universities, clever and brilliant to a degree, but eaten up with cynicism. And I knew that young man's mother; it was to her that he owed his educational advantages. She was not clever as the world counts cleverness; but no sweeter, saintlier soul ever breathed. Her face was a perpetual benediction; it shone as though, to use a little child's phrase, there were "a light inside." And I have heard that young university sprig, who was not worthy to unloose his mother's shoe-latchet, talk down to her, and patronize her with a but half-disguised contempt, until I could have struck the man! Did you ever read this: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it"? But, I tell you, I would meet that or any doom

rather than stand at the last great day with a sin like that upon my head unforgiven in the presence of the son of Mary.

On the other hand, can he be wholly without the root of the matter in him who does worthily respond to a mother's love? Few men of our day, perhaps, have given so much needless pain to many Christian people, or have uttered so many wild and whirling words with such a demure recklessness, as the late Mr. Matthew Arnold. But when I read his recently published *Letters*, so brimming with tenderness towards his widowed mother, I almost forgave him everything. To some people Thomas Carlyle is little better than an ill-natured cur, snarling and snapping at the heels of every passer-by. But let every young man read Carlyle's letters to his mother; perhaps there is nothing quite like them in our literature. Jean Carlyle was only a humble peasant woman in Annandale; but her son gave of his best when he wrote to her; and for the wondrous love he bare her shall not much be forgiven him at the last by the son of Mary?

Have my words stirred long-sleeping memories? Have I touched without knowing it some secret spring, and set wide open a door that has not moved for years upon its rusty hinges? While I have been speaking have other voices been speaking—voices out of the dim past, words of the sainted dead? Is it so? Some little scene like this swims up from the days long gone by: A

darkened room, with hushed voices, and feet that tread softly, a white face on the pillow, and then the words broken and slow, "It is growing dark —I am going home—meet me where I go." And then another voice, half-choked with sobs, "I will, by God's help, I will." That other voice is yours, changed though it be that even you yourself scarce know it. Tell me, what have you done with that "sweet, olden promise"? I am treading, I know, on ground that is holy; I am touching a string that I have never dared to touch before; but, if it vibrates, if there are voices out of the past like these that can speak to you, oh! listen to them; they will plead as no poor words of mine can plead; hear, and follow, and obey.

> "God of our fathers! be the God
> Of their succeeding race."

THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF JESUS

III

THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF JESUS

'Is not this . . . the brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us?"—MARK vi. 3.

I HAVE spoken in a previous sermon of the mother of Jesus. To-day I want us to take another glance into that little home at Nazareth.

Of the head of the household himself there is little to be told. Joseph disappears from the narrative very early; and the probability is that he died many years before Jesus entered on the work of His public ministry. But Joseph and Mary and Jesus were not the only members of the family. There were at least seven children: five boys—Jesus and the four whose names are mentioned in the text—and (at least) two girls, though of these neither the exact number nor the names are told, so that the little home would be very crowded, and very noisy sometimes; and you mothers, at least, will not need to be told that

with so many mouths to feed, and so many things to think about, Mary must have found her hands very full. It is of these other members of the family that we are to think to-day: my subject is, The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus.

I

In the first place, are there not some of us to whom it never occurred before that Jesus had brothers and sisters just as we have? Indeed, everything that is human in the life of Jesus is to some of us more or less unreal. We accept the statements of theology concerning His humanity, but with a certain mental reserve. Even when one of the sacred writers himself tells us "He was tempted in all points like as we are," we doubt whether he meant quite all he said; and to some of us, it is to be feared, the temptation in the wilderness is little more than a scenic display. We cannot think of Jesus as boy and man, as son and brother, entering like others into ordinary human relationships. We must needs picture Him with a halo of unearthly light about His head, and, as Professor Rendel Harris has recently pointed out, even a writer like Dean Farrar cannot speak of the "boy" Jesus without printing the word with a capital B, as if to suggest that He was never like other children. The truth is, many of us are Apollinarians without knowing it.

It is not difficult to understand the reason of

all this. Christ was more than a man, and we are jealous—rightly jealous—of His divinity, for we know how much hangs upon it. I share that jealousy to the full, and I will be bold to say that no one who has heard me preach half-a-dozen consecutive sermons will charge me with lack of fidelity here. But let us make no mistake; we do not strengthen by one jot the proof of Christ's divinity by doubting the truth of His humanity. I know the difficulty of a full and balanced statement of the whole truth. Our only safe course is to follow the New Testament, and to declare unflinchingly alike the Manhood and the Godhead of Jesus, refusing to exalt either at the expense of the other. When therefore we think, as we are doing just now, of the humanity of Jesus, we must take care not to go one step farther than the Gospels lead us; but we ought also to be careful to go as far; and when they describe to us, *e.g.* the childhood of Jesus, do not let us, by little and needless devices of our own, throw "an air of undue mystery about what is perfectly natural" (I quote the words of Mr. Rendel Harris again), and so hinder ourselves from entering into fellowship with Christ's early years.

It is probably a mistake of this kind which is, in the main, responsible for the different opinions which still exist as to the exact relationship of Jesus to those who are here called His "brothers" and "sisters." The most natural inference undoubtedly is that they were the children of Joseph

and Mary, born subsequent to the birth of Jesus. But owing to the strength of the feeling—in my judgment a wholly mistaken feeling—that it was somehow derogatory alike to the honour of Jesus and of Mary to suppose that she was the mother of other children besides Him, two other interpretations have been able to take the field and command very considerable support. On the one hand it has been held that the so-called "brethren" of our Lord were in reality His cousins, the children of Mary, a sister of the Virgin, and the wife of Cleophas. On the other hand, they are said to be the children of Joseph by a former marriage.

The difficulties in the way of the first of these suggested interpretations are insuperable: it supposes two sisters each bearing the name of Mary; it gives no explanation of the fact that our Lord's brethren are always named in conjunction with Mary the mother of Jesus, and never, as we should expect, if this interpretation be the right one, with Mary the wife of Cleophas; and it still further leaves unexplained the fact that though there is in the Greek language a word for "cousin" which lay ready to their hand, the New Testament writers never once make use of it in this connection. As for the other interpretation, it undoubtedly raises fewer difficulties, and is supported by the weighty name of Bishop Lightfoot. But even his learned arguments leave me unconvinced. The natural interpretation is that which I have

already given ; nowhere do the sacred writers seek to guard their readers against it, and it is difficult to see what other language they could have used if that had been the meaning which they had actually desired to convey. For my part, I cannot get rid of the idea that had it been any other than Christ concerning whose relationship the language of the Gospels had been used, these rival theories would never have been heard of ; that it *is* Christ does not make them necessary. When shall we learn that to make the human ties of Jesus as unreal and as unlike our own as possible is to render Him no true and worthy homage ?

II

Assuming then, without further discussion, that the natural interpretation of the text is the right one, let us gather together what we know of the brothers and sisters of Jesus, and of His relation to them. Unfortunately the records are extremely scanty ; Jesus was more than thirty years of age, and the work of His ministry had already begun before we even learn of their existence. Of their life together during those thirty silent years at Nazareth we can only dimly conjecture from what we are told after the silence is broken. One fact, however, stands out with sad pre-eminence, " His brethren did not believe on Him." Not one of them belonged to the apostolic group. As Dr. Stalker says, they never intervene in His life

except to annoy. So far were they from understanding the passion which consumed Him, that on one occasion "they went out to lay hold on Him, for they said, He is beside himself." Once, impressed, perhaps, by His marvellous works and His influence with the people, they urged him to go up to Jerusalem, and there publicly declare Himself to the world. Some people can never see greatness until it is recognized greatness, greatness duly ticketed and authenticated. At a great picture sale, when thousands of pounds change hands, it is not pictures only, but great names that are bought and sold. And it may be the brothers of Jesus felt that if only the wise ones in the great city put their seal upon Him and His mission, it would be safe and prudent for them to declare themselves on His side.

Was not this one of the secret griefs of the Man of Sorrows? He came unto them that were in a special sense "His own," and they received Him not. It pained Him when "many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him"; it pained Him more when Judas, one of the twelve, betrayed Him; but most of all, I think, it hurt Him when "even His brethren did not believe on Him." When He uttered the sad prophecy, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household," was He speaking out of the fulness of His own pained heart? Some of us know the difficulty of being loyal to our conscience and our faith amongst ungodly associates in the shop and

the workroom; but only they who have felt the far worse pain that want of sympathy at home can inflict, are able fully to enter into the feelings of Him who was thus cruelly wounded in the house of His friends.

But the change came at last, and after Christ's ascension into heaven we find the brethren together with the disciples awaiting in the upper room at Jerusalem the descent of the Holy Spirit. Exactly how the change was wrought we are not told; but perhaps there is a hint of what took place in one of Paul's letters: writing of the appearances of Christ after His resurrection, he says (1 Cor. xv. 6, 7), "Then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once; . . . then He appeared to James." What one would have given to have been present at that interview between the risen Lord and His brother after the flesh! May it not have been to it that James owed his faith in Jesus as Lord, and through him the other brethren theirs? And may not James have had that appearing to himself alone in mind when in after years he wrote: "My brethren, if any among you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins"?

The rest is soon told. Of the brethren of our Lord two are never heard of again; of the others one lived to hold a most important position in

the Church at Jerusalem, and both were writers of brief epistles preserved for us in the New Testament. One point in connection with these letters is worthy of note: neither James nor Jude ever speaks of himself as "the brother of Christ." The opening verse of the Epistle of James runs thus: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," etc.; of the Epistle of Jude thus: "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James," etc.; and in the fourth verse of the same epistle the writer makes it his chief charge against certain men who had crept into the Church privily, that they were "denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Now, consider what this means. These three, Jesus and James and Jude, had been brought up and for years had lived together in the same home. There was a time when James and Jude did not believe in Jesus as in any wise differing from themselves. Something happened, and they came to believe in Him. From that day He was to them another being. That they were related to Him after the flesh was as nothing in comparison with what they now knew Him to be. He was to them no longer the man of Nazareth simply, but the Lord of Glory; they served God in serving Him; to deny Him was the greatest of all sins.

What do we make of this? How shall we explain it? I do not shrink from putting the old alternative for the hundreth time. Give up your faith in the Bible altogether, use it to light your

fires with, if you will; but to deny the Godhead of Christ and at the same time to go on believing in the truthfulness or sanity of the men who wrote it, is of all mental impossibilities the maddest.

III

Turn again for a moment to the home at Nazareth that we may see Jesus among His brothers and sisters. One is tempted to regret that so little of that home-life is known to us. But from what we do know of Christ, His teaching concerning marriage, His love for children, His regard for the filial relationship, we may be confident that as brother He would not be found wanting.

The subject suggests one aspect of what may be termed "domestic morality," concerning which the pulpit has usually little to say, and on which even the New Testament is curiously silent. St. Paul speaks more than once wise words of counsel to husbands and wives, to parents and children, to masters and servants, but nowhere does he address himself directly to brothers and sisters. Nevertheless the subject is one of considerable importance at the present time, when there is a tendency to rebel against obligations once accepted without demur, and to call in question the value of institutions which we have hitherto regarded as part, I will not say of the established, but of the

divine order. Particularly is this true of the institution of the family. The subject of marriage, which, I need hardly say, is the key of the whole question, is just now being discussed by men and women alike in a fashion that may well make the boldest amongst us wince. But that is a matter which lies outside the scope of this address, and I have nothing further to say concerning it just now. But it is not to be wondered at that those who would make of marriage "an arrangement terminable at the will of either party"—I quote the words of two living writers—should go farther and pour contempt upon the idea that any particular obligation is involved in the fact of a common parentage. Teaching of this sort strikes a blow at all that is most sacred in life. Consanguinity implies not only a physical but also an ethical relationship. To ignore it, to treat the bond of brotherhood and sisterhood as if it were a gossamer thread which any man is at liberty to snap whenever it pleases him, is to take a step—in my judgment a long step—towards reducing society to a mere collection of brutes.

I do not wish to set up any impossible ideal. Happily there are many, like Charles and Mary Lamb, like William and Dorothy Wordsworth, whose choicest friendships have been formed within the family circle, but more often our best and closest friends are found outside that circle. "More than my brothers are to me," said Tennyson of his friend, and so perhaps say most of us

of ours. But—you remember Savonarola's great words to Romola, fleeing from Florence and from duty—"*Man cannot choose his duties.*" Morality, that "stern lawgiver," knows nothing of a convenient sliding scale which adjusts our obligations according to the pleasure which the fulfilment of them yields us.

Slacken one of the bonds that bind home together, and you slacken all; and the end of that who can tell? Remember what we owe to home; it is the sanctuary that shelters us in our tendcrest years from the world's biting winds; it is the school wherein we learn what no other of life's many schools can teach. Destroy it, and what will you put in its stead? The class-room? the club-room? Ah! it is easy to find fault with things as they are; yet it is to home that we owe the highest of what we are and have; therefore let us count well the cost before we lend our strength to theirs who are seeking its destruction.

We who are brothers and sisters, are we doing what we can to make home all that it ought to be? do we diligently cultivate what some one has happily called the "art of living together"? "Is he a Christian?" asked some one of Whitefield concerning another. "I do not know," was the answer; "I have never seen him at home." Is ours a religion that will stand that test? Rather, are there not some of us who act upon the tacit assumption that family relationship absolves us from all necessity of being kindly and considerate

and thoughtful at home? I have known some married couples whose stock of little kindly attentions to one another was so scanty one felt that it must have been used up during the days of courtship.

Young men and women, do not treat your home as if it were only a restaurant or a hotel—a place to sleep and take your meals in. Do not keep all your mirth and sunshine for other people's homes, and be dull and gloomy in your own. If you have a "best," save it for your own fireside. You may build a house with bricks, but not a home; home is built of hearts. Six people may live together under the same roof and call themselves a family, yet there may be no true family life. Home is a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, whose builder and maker is love. May every one of us be a wise master-builder, after the pattern of Him who for thirty years lived as son and brother in the house of Mary!

IV

Yes, we think; and if it had been ours to live, like James and Joses and the rest of them, in the same house with *Him*, how easy it would have been to be good! How often do we find ourselves singing with the children—

> "I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
> When Jesus was here amongst men . . .
> I should like to have been with Him then."

Well, there is another side even to that. There is such a thing as the disadvantage of advantages. The penalty of living close to the mountain is sometimes that one never sees the mountain at all. Perhaps the brethren of our Lord would have been nearer to Him if they had been farther from Him. Not until He had gone from them did they come near to Him.

But what I want us to see is that all may enter that "Holy Family." When "one said unto Him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to thee, He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." *He that doeth the will of my Father in heaven*—he is the man who stands nearest to Christ. Others might call James "the Lord's brother"; he called himself the "servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ." The new relationship was deeper, more sacred even than the old.

And that same fellowship, with all of divine blessedness that goes with it, is open to us today. Let us come to God, let us lay our hands in His, let us say to Him, "Lo, I come to do thy will," and even of us Jesus will say, "Behold, My brother, and sister, and mother."

WHAT THINK YE OF GOD?

IV

WHAT THINK YE OF GOD?

"And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac."—
GENESIS xxxi. 53.
"When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven."—
LUKE xi. 2.

"THE fear of his father Isaac"—what does that mean? The word "fear" should be printed with a capital F, and you will find it is printed so in the Revised Version. "The Fear"—that is the name which Isaac gave to his God. You remember the incident: Jacob and Laban had entered into a covenant, and each of them confirmed the covenant with an oath. Laban, we are told, sware "by the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor," that is, he sware by Jehovah, and by the idol whom their common ancestor worshipped as God. But Jacob—and it is this I wish to emphasize—sware by "the Fear of his father Isaac," that is, Jacob sware by Him whom Isaac worshipped as "the Fear." All these Old Testament patriarchs and saints had their own

name for the God whom they served; to one He was "the Rock," to another "the Shield," to another "the Shepherd"; but to Isaac He was "the Fear," "the Dreadful One," or "the Terror."

That was Isaac's name for God. What think ye of God? How do we name Him? What is He to us? "Nothing is easier," says John Henry Newman somewhere, "than to use the name of God and to mean nothing by it." "I believe in God"—so begins the Apostles' Creed; and we must all begin there—there is the foundation, the starting-point. "He that cometh to God must believe *that He is*." But now take heed how you punctuate Scripture; there is no full stop there—"must believe that He is, *and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*." That is to say, we need to be assured not only of the existence, but of the character of God. You believe in God? Good. But what sort of a God do you believe in? What is He of whom you speak? How do you name Him?

Voltaire has been credited with a poor witticism to the effect that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent Him. There is a sentence of Mr. Herbert Spencer's which Christian apologists often quote: "The assumption of the existence of a First Great Cause of the Universe is a necessity of thought." A distinguished living scientist said not long ago that it is modern science itself that has dealt the death-blow to atheism. Doubtless this is all very interesting; but, practically, I do

not see that it helps us very much. A great thinker in his study, brooding over the vast mystery of being, feels himself lost in an illimitable void. He wants a peg, a starting-point, and so he posits a First Great Cause—in order that he may think. The world to him is unintelligible, unthinkable, incomplete; and so he rounds it off with a God. A very distinguished race of gentlemen, the Gifford lecturers, have been during the last few years enlightening the theological darkness of the land of Scotland. One of them, a distinguished Oxford professor, stated in one of his lectures that the only thing to be said about God without impertinence is that "He is." Well, if that is so, I venture to say (also I hope without impertinence) that it was hardly worth while saying even that; and still more do I doubt whether it was worth while coming all the way from Oxford to Glasgow in mid-winter in order to say it. A God of whom nothing is known, of whom nothing can be known, whose very existence is only postulated as a kind of intellectual convenience—what basis for religion have you there? Do you think the flowers of love and hope and trust will grow in a soil so thin and poor as that? You believe in God; but again I ask, What sort of a God do you believe in? Until the terms are defined the confession is worthless.

I am not blowing theological soap-bubbles. This is not a matter of interest merely to ministers and students of divinity. I speak to busy men

of the world, and I say that for them this is a question of the very first practical importance. That old, miserable, shallow sophism that says it does not matter what a man believes if only his life is right, nowhere breaks down so hopelessly, so pitiably, as it does here. Our idea of God is determining, regulative, fundamental. As some one has happily put it, "The thought you make of God is the thought that makes you."

You may illustrate the truth in a hundred ways. A very distinguished student of religion has pointed out in one of his books that, "as is the Deity, so must the faith that is built upon Him be." "Find out," he says, "the ultimate beliefs of a people, and you find out the character of their institutions." And then he goes on to illustrate. Look at China, where the worship of ancestors is believed in and practised; what is the consequence? Why, that China, with its eyes for ever fixed upon the past, is the least progressive of all the great nations on the face of the earth to-day. Look at India, where Brahma is conceived of as the universal soul. From the head of Brahma (for the idea is worked out in detail) come the men of the priestly race, from the arms and breast of Brahma come the warrior class, from the legs of Brahma come the yeomen, and from the feet the poor, toiling, out-cast multitudes. So that, as Dr. Fairbairn says, "in India a religious theory has become a social tyranny." But there is no need to go so far afield as India or China.

Read the story, the thrilling story, of our great Puritan and Covenanting Scottish forefathers, and if there is anything that history can make certain to us, it was their thought of God that made them the men they were.

Or turn to your Bibles and see how this same truth is illustrated for us again and again. Wherever the idea of God is real it is regulative. The Syrians engaged in battle with the Israelites; the battle was fought on the hills, and the Israelites were victors. Now mark what the servants of the king of Syria said unto him: "Their God is a God of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." Theirs was a *local* God. As "the ancients of the house of Israel" practised their abominations in the dark, they tried to quiet their fears with this word: "The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." Theirs was an *absentee* God. Listen to the Pharisees: "We are the people, and the truth shall die with us; but as for this multitude, which knoweth not the law, they are accursed." Theirs was a *partial* God. And so one might go on almost endlessly. Read the twenty-third Psalm again. Tell me, how does it begin? With a thought of God, "The Lord is my Shepherd." I do not wonder that the man who wrote that wrote the whole psalm. There are no heights and depths that are not possible to that man. All the psalm is in that first word of

the psalm; all its music is in the first, grand, full chord that is struck there. And just as to-day the full green foliage of the summer is wrapped in the bare, brown sheath of the springtide, so all the love and trust and tenderness of which the psalm is full lie folded there in that first thought of God—"The Lord is my Shepherd." What think *ye* of God? How do we name Him? And remember the answer colours all our life and determines all our thinking.

What, then, is the true thought of God, and whence comes it? where may it be found? I must compress very much. For answer we are shut up to Jesus Christ. Arguments from metaphysics about the necessary existence of God may carry us a little way; arguments from what is called "design" in nature may do something for us; but when you have put them all together, what do they really amount to? One whose word on a matter of this sort deserves to be weighed, recently said, speaking of the work of a most accomplished writer and thinker: "If there is nothing but his reasonings between us and death, the very grave is at our feet." Never, perhaps, have men felt the truth of the words of the Master more than they are feeling it to-day: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Some thought of God we may have, some conception of Him, apart from Christ, but "no man cometh unto the *Father* but by me." To the idea of the Infinite, the Absolute, the Eternal, we may climb,

but to "the Father" never, without Jesus. I think sometimes of modern thought like another Jacob, wrestling through the long, dark night with the strange mysterious Presence that eludes it, crying, "Tell me thy name; I will not let thee go except thou bless me." But until it hear the voice of Christ the day will never break, nor the answer "Love" be given. One only has taught us, and made us certain with His own certainty, that when we pray we may say "Our Father which art in heaven." There is the true thought of God, and it is only ours when we come to Christ and learn of Him.

I shall not attempt this morning to show you how, all through His life, Jesus expounded and illustrated and enforced that great doctrine. I wish very simply, and following the line already suggested, to indicate how, if this thought of God which Christ has given us be fully grasped, it will affect our whole life.

"When ye pray, say, Our Father." "*Our* Father," not "My Father"; Christ might have bid men pray so, but the prayer would have been a smaller, narrower prayer. "Our Father," mine, yours, every man's; and therefore "all ye are brethren," and the new thought of God is a new thought of our fellow-men; "what God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Sonship—spell the word backwards and what is it? Brotherhood! Every gift that I receive as son I owe and I must share as brother; and every step I take

into the deepening mystery of the divine Fatherhood means the tightening of the bonds of human brotherhood. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."

"*When ye pray*, say, Our Father which art in heaven." I think that is the alpha and the omega of prayer. He only has rightly learned to pray who has learned to say "Father." I do not know any other word that will silence all the obstinate questionings of the intellect. Your wise and learned man asks, "Does God answer prayer?" and then for answer writes a long and learned book. Ay, and if God is only a Somewhat behind all things, the book will need to be very long and very learned, and even then all our questions will not be answered. But if God be "Father," I think the question is meaningless, it is irrelevant. For what father is silent in the home of his children? I hear sometimes good, Christian people timidly asking one another, and sometimes asking their ministers, "Is it right to pray for this?" "May I pray for that?" With painful care things are sifted and separated into what may be prayed for and what may not be prayed for. "When ye pray, say Father." Now tell me what has Fatherhood to do with all these painful distinctions, these niceties of discrimination? "Ask what ye will"; it is the children's right. "Ask what ye will"; then leave the rest with Him.

See what Fatherhood makes of *pain*. In the

garden of Gethsemane the Saviour bowed beneath His awful burden; the great red drops fell from His worn face; His hand trembled as it held the cup; thrice He prayed, "If it be possible, if it be possible, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Yet He drained it to its last, bitterest drop. What was it made Him in that hour of weakness strong to do and to endure? "The cup which My Father hath given Me—which My Father hath given Me—shall I not drink it?" I draw a bow at a venture. Are there not some here listening to me this day whom desolating sorrows have driven sometimes almost to the verge of madness? It seemed as if they could not drink that cup and live; but in that awful hour—how awful let him say who has passed through it—one thought steadied and saved them, "It is the cup which my Father hath given me; His hand mixed it; and He makes no mistakes."

There is a beautiful story told of a gentleman who went as a visitor into a deaf and dumb institution. A number of children were there; and as he stood in the presence of the silent little ones the teacher of the class asked him if he would care to put a question to them. The visitor paused for a moment hardly knowing what to say; then taking the chalk from the teacher's hand he wrote upon the black-board, "Why did God make you deaf and dumb, while He has made me so that I can both speak and hear?" For a moment no one moved. Then one little fellow crept

noiselessly from his seat, and under the visitor's question on the board he wrote, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." What more can one say?

See what Fatherhood makes of *death*. Once more I turn to Christ. He stands there with the little timorous group of disciples, the hot breath of the last enemy on His cheek, but His words are strong and calm as ever: "I go unto the Father." That word is never so often upon His lips as in these the great crises of His life. That unknown Beyond, to us so dim and dark, a strange land full of shadows, to Him it is "My Father's house." And when at length death came, it was with Him no leap into the dark: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

"A king was sitting with his warriors round the fire in a long, dark barn. It was night and winter. Suddenly a little bird flew in at the open door, and flew out again at the other. The king spoke and said, 'This bird is like man in the world; it flew in from darkness, and out again to darkness, and was not long in the warmth and light.' 'King,' replied the oldest of the warriors, 'even in the dark the bird is not lost, but finds its nest.'" No; even in the dark that men call death the soul is not lost, but finds its home. "Into Thy hands, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Oh! what think we of God? How do we name Him? Is He "Fear," or is He "Father"?

An Australian newspaper told some little time ago of a railway man who used to send a message to his wife, saying when he would be home, and often he would put in a little word for his boy Arthur, "Tell Arthur I shall sleep with him to-night." But a day came when Arthur lay hot and feverish in his mother's arms, sick unto death. "Don't ky, mother," he said, "I sall seep wiv Dod, 'oo know. Send a teledraf to heaven, and tell Dod I sall seep wiv Him to-night." I would rather hear my child talk about God in that fashion than know that she had all our Presbyterian and Methodist catechisms off by heart. What are we making of God? What is He to us? Have we learned to call Him Father?

But, perchance—again I draw a bow at a venture—there may be some man here to-day whose own bad past will not let him call God Father. The word chokes him—it sticks in his throat, it dies away unspoken on his lips. "I remembered God and was troubled," says one of the psalmists, and when some men think of God and then of what lies behind in the days that are gone, they cannot but be troubled. The prodigal's fear lies heavy on their heart: "I am not worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." Oh, man with the broken staff, and bruised feet, and tottering limbs, haste thee home again! Thy Father calls for thee. Lost though thou art, thou art still a lost son, and thy Father will meet all the words of thy

poor self-chiding with His own great words of love, "This my son—my *son*"—He will not let us be His hired servants—"this, my son, was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."

CHARACTER AND CREED

V

CHARACTER AND CREED

"Ye call me, Master, and, Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet."—JOHN xiii. 13, 14.

"MASTER and Lord"—that is what the disciples called Jesus; that is what men call Him still. The judgment of these poor fishermen has been affirmed and reaffirmed by the best and wisest of all the ages. The world has taken these great names from off their lips, and made them its own. True, it has seemed sometimes as if men were wavering in their faith, as if they doubted whether after all He was the coming One, and they must not still look for another; but to-day, after criticism and inquiry for eighteen centuries have done their best and their worst, the old faith abides in growing strength; men still call this Jesus of Nazareth "Master and Lord."

> "Thou seemest human and divine,
> The highest, holiest manhood, Thou."

This is the great fact of history. Take Christ

for what you will, define His person as you please, there is nothing to parallel the universal homage paid to Him. Nay, the more you seek to belittle Him, the more grudgingly you acknowledge His claims to supreme divinity, the more astounding does His sovereignty become. Explain it as we may, nothing can empty the fact of its surpassing wonder.

To one paying his first visit to the Continent there is nothing, perhaps, more impressive than this, that everywhere men call this Jesus "Master and Lord." The traveller finds himself moving among strange peoples; they speak a language which he does not understand, their thoughts are fed by a literature which he has never opened; they are the inheritors of great traditions that to him are wholly foreign; they have their own peculiar temperament, their own points of view, their own habits of mind—their whole world is different from his. And yet, amid all these differences, wherever he journeys—in Belgium, in France, in Germany, in Switzerland, in Italy—alike in the great crowded city, and in some distant upland glen where the noontide stillness is broken only by the roar of the avalanche or the mountain torrent, he finds the Christian church where men gather to worship Jesus, both their Lord and his. I said "everywhere"; I ought, I suppose, to have excepted Turkey, and perhaps the exception is in its way as significant as any example could be, for unless the unspeakable

Turk make haste to set his house in order, the probability is that before the twentieth century is many years old he will be turned, bag and baggage, out of Europe altogether.

And if we look at our own land, amid whatever conflicting signs, the same fact of the sovereignty of Christ grows more and more unmistakable to all clear-sighted observers. Theology to-day is—to use a word that has become popular of late—"Christo-centric" to a degree that it has perhaps never been before. "Back to Christ" has become in certain quarters a kind of theological watchword, and we are sometimes told, with a touch of exaggeration, that this age has witnessed something like a rediscovery of Christ. Have you ever asked why it is that so many good men, who know the facts, steadily refuse to be alarmed at the results of recent Biblical criticism? It is because they have come to know that their faith rests for its foundation upon no book, not even upon the Bible, but upon the living Christ Himself.

Look outside the Churches, and the facts are even more significant. A very shrewd observer of men and things (Mr. Frederic Harrison) declared on a recent occasion[1] that the school of thought represented by Mr. Herbert Spencer and the late Professor Huxley, with its religion of the Unknowable, which made of man "an infinitesimal bubble on an infinitesimal speck of sand at the mercy of blind forces," is to-day wholly discredited.

[1] The anniversary of Comte's death.

Indications of the change lie to our hand on every side. The atheist movement once headed by Mr. Bradlaugh, Mrs. Besant, and the *National Reformer* has been utterly routed. Mr. John Morley, like his great master John Stuart Mill before him, is receding farther and farther every day from the hard and bitter defiance of his earlier writings. The late Professor Romanes, one of the most distinguished scientists of his day, left in his desk for publication a complete recantation of his early materialistic creed, and died a devout member of the Church of Christ. Mr. Benjamin Kidd writes a book to prove that the dominant factor in social development is religion, and it is received with almost universal acclaim. Mr. Gladstone, in one political camp, spends the evening of his days in sending forth volume after volume in defence or exposition of the Christian faith, and in attempts not always wise or fruitful to bring about the reunion of Christendom; while Mr. Balfour, in the opposite camp, fills up the interstices of a busy public life writing *Notes introductory to the Study of Theology*. And if from these we turn to the men who are to-day doing the best work in the world of fiction, to men like Stevenson, and Barrie, and Kipling, and "Q," and Crockett, and Ian Maclaren, the same hopeful signs greet us; the attitude of all these writers toward religion is frankly sympathetic, and in not a few cases their greatest triumphs have been won in the field of humble religious life.

But I need not go outside our own lives. Little as some of us may acknowledge it, is there any fact so potent there as the Lordship of Jesus? In all our days there is a difference because, if not we ourselves, at least the family, the community of which we are members, has learned to call Christ "Master and Lord." Why are we here to-day? Why in our city are all the shops shuttered and all the warehouses silent? You wrote a letter yesterday, and at the top of it you put "July 1896." 1896 what? Years. Years since when? Do you not see that at every turn of our life we are brought face to face with the great fact of all time, the coming to His own of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

"Ye call me Master and Lord." What then? What does Christ say to them that so name Him?

I

He accepts the title: "Ye call me, Master, and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." Mark that calm, unhesitating acceptance of these great names, and consider what it means. These words do not stand alone, they are typical of a hundred others. There are two strands interwoven all through the life of Christ: humility the most perfect and beautiful, such as the world had never known before, and side by side with it the most tremendous self-assertion. He said, and men have admitted that He had a right to say, "I am meek

and lowly in heart"; and yet, when His disciples call Him "Master, and, Lord," He never for a moment shrinks; He never speaks as though He felt himself unworthy of confidence so great; nay, Himself takes the crown from their hands and puts it upon His brow: "Ye say well; for so I am."

How do we explain this? I know a man who once suffered unjust imprisonment in a righteous cause. When the day of his release came round, his friends organized a great demonstration of welcome for him in Exeter Hall. Thunders of applause greeted him when he stepped on to the platform; when he rose to speak the vast audience was almost beside itself with excitement. He began something like this: "It is all very kind of you, and I thank you for it; but there is danger in this. You are making too much of me; you will forget the cause in the man, and if you do that, God will shatter me that the cause itself may not suffer." And all who heard him knew that he was right.

But Jesus never talked so. He never urged men to "forget Him in the cause." Nay, He never spoke about a "cause" at all; all His speech was concerning Himself. We talk sometimes of Christianity as if it were a kind of ecclesiastical "concern" that Jesus Christ had started, and which we have to keep going. But Christ never discussed Christianity as a something apart from Himself; Himself was centre, circumference, all. "What think ye of Me?" He said;

"will ye serve and follow Me?"—that was primary, essential; all else was but secondary.

Again, I ask, what shall we say of one who speaks after this fashion? Do you say He was a great and good man, the greatest and best of men? If you cannot say more than that, you cannot say as much as that. No man, however great or good, ever spoke concerning himself as Jesus did. No; either He was what He said He was, what He believed Himself to be, and then all is clear; or—I know the alternative is a harsh one, but try as I will, I can find no middle path—He stands self-convicted of the stupidest ignorance and blasphemy.

II

But Christ further declared—and this is what I want specially to emphasize—that they that confessed Him as "Master and Lord" *thereby placed themselves under manifold moral obligations:* "Ye call me Lord and Master . . . and ye ought—" we may disregard for the moment the particular duty mentioned by Christ; the point to catch is this, that while it is right to call Christ "Master and Lord," it is not enough so to name Him; we cannot stop there. If we call Him "Master and Lord," then "we ought——"; you may fill in the blank a hundred ways, but remember, the confession carries the obligation along with it. And it is this obligation that springs out of and

is part of our faith in Christ as Lord and Master that I want us for a moment to fix our attention upon.

I have no sympathy whatever with the attempt that is often made to set these two things, creed and character, over against one another as though they were contrary the one to the other. A great deal of shallow nonsense which often manages to get itself passed off as profound wisdom is talked nowadays to this effect, that it doesn't matter what a man believes if only his life be right, which is very much like saying that it doesn't matter what kind of a foundation you lay, if only the house be strong; but inasmuch as neither a stable dwelling nor a strong life can be built without a secure foundation, both sayings verge upon the ridiculous. The Bible never once makes these wholly meaningless and mischievous distinctions; it urges the importance of right thinking, and it urges the importance of right living; which of the two is the more important it wastes no words in attempting to discuss. In point of fact the one is impossible without the other.

Nevertheless we Christians cannot too often or too sharply remind ourselves of the moral obligation which is the other half of faith. We call Christ "Master and Lord"; is His great "ye ought" sounding through our souls? Our feet are at the starting-point; is our face to the goal? Are we seeking to fulfil, do we even realize, the

solemn responsibilities that lie wrapped up in the very homage that we pay to Him? Do we know that such homage is useless and worse than useless if it stops short with itself? I am speaking, I know, but the simplest commonplaces, and I feel the difficulty that every preacher knows so well, of speaking them in such a fashion that they shall stick; but I say to you, and I say to myself, do not let us give to Christ these great names if that is all we have to give Him; do not let us put the crown upon His head if it be only to smite the sceptre from His hand, and to refuse to have Him to reign over us.

Whatever may be said of our thinking on other subjects, no man's theology is safe that is not brought into constant contact with actual life. When I open the Bible, again and again I find its great doctrinal statements—the texts that are the basis of all our theologies—side by side with its plainest moral precepts. It may be true that the pulpit has usually been more anxious about creed than about character; it is certainly no fault of the Scriptures. Every great revelation of truth there is followed by its solemn "ye ought." "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us." O wondrous word of grace to sinful man! But read on; we have not reached the full stop yet: "and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Or, take this great passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: "Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality

with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross"; or this, from St. Peter's First Epistle: "Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ." Now, does any one suppose that these passages were simply meant to supply "proof-texts" for theological handbooks? I do not for a moment wish to imply that we have no right to put them to such a use, far from it; but their primary significance, as any one may see who will read the context for himself, was not doctrinal, but practical. Paul is exhorting the Philippians to humility, to a thoughtful regard for the things of others, and he points them to the amazing condescension of the Son of God. Peter is urging his readers to be sober, to put away their former lusts, and their vain manner of life handed down from their fathers, remembering at how great a price they had been redeemed. But perhaps the most remarkable illustration of this interlacing of duty with doctrine is hidden by the unfortunate division of our English Bible into chapters—an advantage, by the way, for which the ordinary reader has often to pay a heavy penalty. Every one is familiar with the glorious fifteenth of First Corinthians. We have followed the path of its mag-

nificent argument until we have stood with the apostle, breathless but triumphant, on its highest crest: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And then the chapter stops and the book is shut. Will you open it again and read on into the sixteenth chapter? "Now concerning the collection for the saints." Remember there were no chapters in Paul's letter. When he had finished his great argument on the Resurrection he did not say, "Bring me a new sheet, let me make a fresh start, what goes before has nothing to do with what comes after." No; the man with these high hopes for the future is the man who owes most to his needy brethren on the earth, and the apostle's pen runs straight on without a break to plead the cause of Christ's suffering poor. Alas! this is just where so many of us always fail: our doctrine never affects our practice; our beliefs are so many hard and barren seeds that never fruit. To-day in church we say "Master and Lord"; but to-morrow in business —ah, that is another matter.

Is there anything the Church so urgently needs to-day as the filling-up of this gap between what we profess and what we are? Ask the first ten non-churchgoing working men you meet, why it is that they never attend God's house, and nine of them will tell you, probably bluntly enough, that

they fail to see that they who do go are any better than they who don't. "And pity 'tis 'tis true"; we call Christ "Master and Lord," and that is all we do.

I do not wish to speak harshly; I have said these things to myself many times before I have dared to say them once to you; but is it not true that there are some of us who would do the Church of God a greater service by quitting it than we have ever done by being in it? I do not mean that the Church has no room for the weak and the erring; but it is the last place for us—and we know it—so long as we are what we are. Some of you men are office-bearers in Christ's Church—stewards, leaders, elders, deacons, or what not—and some of you women are very busy at mothers' meetings, and Dorcas meetings, and the like; but do you know there is a young man in your shop and a young girl in your kitchen who say that if ever they are to enter into the kingdom of God they will need to push past you, Church members though you are? To our shame be it said, but it is true, there are some who will think better of religion the day we cease to make any profession of it.

Oh, the mock homage that is paid to Christ! "Go, and search carefully concerning the young child," said Herod to the wise men, "and when you have found Him, bring me word that I also may come and worship Him." "Worship!"—what grim irony! murder he meant when he said wor-

ship. "Hail! Rabbi," said Judas, "and kissed Him" even as he betrayed Him; and we shudder at such refinement of treachery. And once again, when the soldiers in their brutal sport made of Him a mimic king, and putting a reed into His hand for sceptre, and a twist of thorns upon His head for a crown, and some cast-off cloak about His shoulders for the kingly purple, they bowed before Him in mock obeisance, crying, "Hail! King of the Jews," and smote Him and spat upon Him, we turn away with hearts shamed and bleeding.

And yet, and yet, is it not this very thing that we, with fuller light and knowledge, are doing every day? We call Him "Master, and, Lord," we join ourselves to His people, we even put our lips to the sacred cup and plight our troth to Him in deathless vows; and then our vows are scattered, and from those same lips drop poisoned words of malice and of envy, and men stay away from Him, the Master, seeing what we His disciples are. "Ye call me Master and Lord . . . and ye ought ——" Shall we not set ourselves this day to seek out the things we owe because we call Christ Jesus, Lord, that henceforth we may walk worthily of Him Whose we are and Whom we serve?

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR MAN

VI

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR MAN

I THINK it was Mr. Spurgeon who once said that if a man wanted to preach about a text to any purpose, he should wait until it leapt at him, like a lion from a thicket, and compelled him to speak about it. A few days ago the subject I am to speak on to-day laid hold of me mightily, and I felt I must preach about it. And yet how to do so worthily, and "to the height of this great argument," I do not know. Christ's love for men is one of the great commonplaces of the Christian pulpit; and there, perhaps, is my chief difficulty. For though nothing is so much needed, nothing is so difficult as the re-stating, the re-vivifying of the commonplace. Truths, like the coins that pass from hand to hand, become worn and defaced, and need ever and again to have their image and superscription stamped upon them afresh. But, as I say, the task is never an easy one; therefore, before we go farther, let us

all, preacher and people alike, pray John Milton's great prayer—

> "What in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support."

I have three or four passages to give you by way of text, but instead of reading them all out at once, I think the better plan will be for us to take them as we go along. And just as you may have seen a jeweller take some beautiful flashing diamond, and set it in its circlet of precious stones, so I want us to take this great truth, the love of Christ for men, and set it round with gathered gems of Holy Writ, that it may catch and fling back again their many-coloured radiance.

I

Here, then, is my first text: "A friend of publicans and sinners." The words were first spoken with a sneer; they were the sorry gibe of the enemies of Christ against Him. But the word spoken in scorn was a true word: He was the "friend of publicans and sinners." And who were they, these "publicans and sinners"? Common, vulgar people, with coarse faces and coarser hearts, rough in speech and rougher in life; men and women with no touch of what we call "refinement" about them, and worse still, moral lepers some of them, foul and unclean. And of such as these men called Jesus, and Jesus

called Himself, the "friend." His was a love for the unloving, the unlovely, the unlovable. That is the first point to notice.

"I love them that love me," said the ancient Wisdom of the book of Proverbs; but Christ's was a love that went far beyond that. "If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye?" He said to His disciples: "I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." And the law that He laid upon His disciples He made the law of His own life. His love did not wait for something without to call it forth; its source was in Himself. He did not love men because of anything they were, but because of what He was. He did not love men because they were good, and He did not cease to love them when they were evil. Again and again He declared He had come to seek and to save that which was lost, to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Look at the two classes in society upon whom in Christ's day the condemnation of their fellows rested most heavily, I mean the publicans and the harlots; and mark Christ's attitude towards them. He calls a publican, Matthew, to be one of His own twelve disciples. When He entered into the city of Jericho, it was another publican, Zaccheus, whom He singled out from among all the crowd, and to whom He said, "To-day I must abide at thy house." Even more wonderful is His treatment of those whom to-day the world calls "fallen

women." Let me say in passing, I hate that phrase, and I never use it except under protest. If there be such a thing as what Archbishop Trench called "morality in words," then, I tell you, that hateful phrase will one day rise up in judgment against the men of this generation. I have seen your miserable social statistics — so many thousands of "fallen women" in this city and in that; but when we judge righteous judgment in these matters, when we see things with Christ's eyes, either that column in your statistics will go, or you will put in a new column by its side, and henceforth talk about fallen men as well as fallen women. But now, see Christ's attitude towards these. The purest woman God ever made cannot measure His infinite recoil from their sin; yet He talked with the woman of Samaria—she that had had five husbands—until a new life beat once more under the ribs of moral death; from her "that was a sinner" He received love's gift in the house of Simon the Pharisee, and said unto her, "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." And when they brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery, and she, to Him asking, "Woman, hath no man condemned thee?" answered, "No man, Lord," He also made answer, "Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way: from henceforth sin no more." Tell me, could love for the unlovely, the unloving, go farther than that? And such was the love of Christ for man.

With what unwearied persistence did His love follow man! He pictured once the good shepherd who goeth after the sheep that is lost "until he find it"; and His own life is the best comment on the words. Some of us begin that search, but we grow weary; and sometimes, alas! the ingratitude of man has left us hard and bitter. But Christ's was a love that "suffered" and still was "kind." His own brethren did not believe on Him; one of the twelve betrayed Him; once, in a crisis of His life, many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more; and even of those who loved Him and remained constant to Him, all were strangely slow and dull to comprehend His meaning. Yet grieved and hurt, saddened and disappointed, as He often was, His love never once turned back. Through all, and in spite of all, He loved man to the end.

Is not this love at its divinest height? All love is beautiful—the love of friend and friend, the love of mother and child, the love of man and woman, what Tennyson calls "the maiden passion for a maid." But in all these love has something to call it forth, to strengthen it, to respond to it. But to love men, not because they are loving, but though they are unloving; to love them in their dirt and grease, in all their physical and moral unloveliness—is not this love's triumph? And such, again, was the love of Christ for man.

What was the secret of His love? It lay partly, as I have already said, in what Christ was

Himself; partly, also, in His view of men. He knew how deeply man had fallen; but He knew also how high he might rise. He never lost sight of the possibilities that lay slumbering and hidden even in the worst. What He Himself was, He knew that God purposed every man should be. Therefore when He looked upon man, He saw not only the man that was, but the man that might be. "If there be a devil in man," says Tennyson, "there is an angel too." Christ saw the angel in man; He loved "the possible saint in the actual devil."

If you and I are to know aught of Christ's love for man, we must keep fast hold of Christ's thoughts concerning man. I heard it publicly stated the other day by one who is well qualified to judge, that many, especially among "the leisured classes," who a few years ago were earnestly engaged in various works of social reform, are to-day gradually edging out of the movement. They have suffered bitter disappointment and disillusioning; they thought they were wanted and would be welcomed, and instead they have been treated with coldness and suspicion. Their fervour had no great steadying faith behind it, and when the first rude shock came they staggered under it and fell; and one by one they are going back to their leisure—their books, their art, their pleasures—to live over again the old self-centred life. There is no love that will stand the wear and the buffetings of life save the love that is rooted firm and deep

in the faith that Christ had concerning them for whom He lived and died.

II

"Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus:" that is my second text. Christ's was an individual love, a love that singled men out; He loved Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus.

That was ever Christ's way. How He spent Himself on the twelve disciples! It was never enough that the multitudes were with Him; He was always saying, in effect, "To-day I must abide at thy house." He talked with Nicodemus by night, with the woman of Samaria at the well-side. Some one has counted no less than nineteen such private interviews recorded for us in the four Gospels. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God," He said, "over one sinner—one sinner—that repenteth." Twice, and twice only, are we told that Jesus wept: "And when He was come near He beheld the city, and wept over it." He remembered all that Jerusalem had been, all that it was, and all that it might have been; then burst His mighty heart: "He beheld the city, and wept over it"—these were the tears of a patriot. And again, when Lazarus lay dead, and Martha and Mary were weeping for their brother, and would not be comforted because he was not, it is written, "Jesus wept"—these were the tears of a friend. He who carried about with

Him daily the burden of the city's sins and sorrows, shared the humble grief of one little home in Bethany. When He hung upon the cross, dying for a world, He remembered His mother: "Woman, behold thy son!" and to John, "Behold thy mother!" And when He came back from the grave, triumphant over death, it was still the same: "Then," says St. Paul, enumerating His various appearances, "He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once; then He appeared to James": to five hundred—then to James. The one is not forgotten in the crowd; James is not lost in the five hundred.

Some speakers in the presence of a large audience depend for half their inspiration upon eager faces picked out in the listening throng. But others will speak for an hour and see nobody; they are conscious only of a great sea of faces; they recognize no individual face. It was not so Christ looked upon men. "Who touched Me?" He said. "Seest Thou the multitude thronging thee," said His disciples, "and sayest Thou, Who touched Me?" "Somebody touched Me," He said again; so true it is, as some one has finely said, "Mankind is all mass to the human eye, all individual to the divine."

Again, does not Christ's example teach us? His philanthropy, as Robertson of Brighton pointed out long ago, was no mere abstraction, it was an aggregate of personal attachments: He loved Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus. But we, as our

homely phrase has it, lay hold of the wrong end of the stick. "Love everybody, love everybody," chatters our modern philanthropy, and that ends in loving nobody. If you would love anybody, says Jesus, you must begin by loving somebody. Charlotte Brontë describes one of her characters in this fashion: "She would give in the readiest manner to people she had never seen—rather, however, to classes than to individuals. *Pour les pauvres*, she opened her purse freely; against *the poor man*, as a rule, she kept it closed. In philanthropic schemes for the benefit of society at large she took a cheerful part: no private sorrow touched her." Does not that describe some of us? A more excellent way show I unto you: "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

III

For my third text we must go to the margin of the Revised Version: "Jesus . . . having loved His own which were in the world, loved them *unto the uttermost*."

Could anything exceed the tender beauty of the familiar words? Just as a mother, knowing that the day so long dreaded has come, and that she and her child must be separated, feels all her heart rushing to her lips for utterance, and crowds these last moments with words and deeds of tender, eager love; so Jesus, knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out

of this world unto the Father, tightens His grasp on these lonely men He is leaving behind Him, and having loved them, now loves them unto the uttermost.

But, perhaps, we may give to these words a still wider significance. Christ loved men "to the uttermost," because He loved men to the death. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends; but God commendeth His love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "Hereby know we love"—herein is love's uttermost revelation of itself—"because He laid down His life for us." It is only at the cross that we see the love of Christ in all its breadth and length and depth and height, and come to know that which ever passeth knowledge. There may be much about that Cross man cannot put into speech; the darkness that fell amid the closing hours of that great tragedy has not wholly lifted yet; perhaps it never will lift to mortal eyes. But whatever else is dark, this at least is clear: He died for us because He loved us, and His death is the measure of His love. God forbid that we should wrangle about the meaning of what we call the Atonement, and miss this, which is its very heart. Jesus was more than a martyr; He was not simply a brave man, paying with His life the penalty of His bravery in the streets of Jerusalem. His life was His own, and no man could snatch it from Him: "I lay it down of Myself," He said. "I have power

to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." His death was the voluntary yielding up of Himself, that we, through His sacrifice, might live.

Herein was love's uttermost. "All His life long He had been revealing His heart through the narrow rifts of His deeds, like some slender lancet windows; but in His death all the barriers are thrown down, and the brightness blazes out upon men. All through His life He had been trying to communicate His love to the world, and the fragrance came from the box of ointment exceeding precious, but when the box was broken the house was filled with the odour."[1] Verily, this was love's uttermost. After this, love itself had no more that it could do; it had given itself away in the service, and for the sake of the loved one.

IV

And now, lastly, mark—all that that love was, it is still. "Unto Him that loveth us," John cried—and this is my last text—"to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever." Note the present term which the Revised Version has happily restored to us: "Unto Him that *loveth* us" not "that loved us." Many years had gone by since Christ had ascended up into heaven, but to John His love was as present and as real as in the days when he walked by His side by the lake

[1] Dr. Maclaren.

of Galilee, or leaned upon His breast at the last supper in the upper room.

Now I want you to go over again all I have been trying to say, and turn all its past tenses into presents, and say not "This is how Christ loved," but rather "This is how He loves." For still He loves the unloving, the unlovely, and the unlovable; still His heart hungers to spend itself on the individual life, and all the wealth of love of which His death speaks is for me if I will receive it.

He loves the bad, the vicious, the worthless, the prodigal. Many waters cannot quench His love; even our sins cannot make Him other than He is. We are all His children. Some are children in the home, happy and joyous and free; and some, alas! are wanderers, weary and wretched, and far from home; yet are we all His children, and He cares for us all as His own. Our sins hide the blessed truth from us sometimes, just as I have seen the mist hide the sun from us, until it hung there in the heavens a ball of fire, lurid and threatening. Yet after all the mists come from the earth, not from the heavens; get above them, and the sun is shining still gracious and lambent as ever. Even the prodigal need not fear to say "Father!" for, thanks be unto God, our sonship stands not in our goodness, but in His love, not in aught that we are to Him, but in what He is to us.

He loves *me*. Whose is the sunshine?

"Ours!" say the giants of the forest, that toss their great arms to the sky, and warm themselves in its light, "ours is the sunshine." "Mine," says the tiny flower, "a violet by a mossy stone, half hidden from the eye," "mine is the sunshine." And whose is the love of Christ? Mine—yours —every man's.

> "Thou art as much His care as if beside
> Nor man nor angel lived in heaven or earth."

He loves me, and He gave Himself up for me. For me love did and gave its uttermost.

A young woman who had spent an evil life lay dying in one of our hospitals.[1] Some one had read to her the words, "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities," and through them she had grasped the mercy of God. Suddenly, as her friends stood by, waiting for the end, she pushed one hand faintly from the cover, and pointing to it with a finger of the other hand, she said, "There is no mark here; *He* was wounded for my transgressions; *He* was bruised for my iniquities." Then again she lay silent, till once more the hands moved, and putting them to her brow she said, "There are no thorns here; *He* was wounded for my transgressions; *He* was bruised for my iniquities." Again she was still, so still they thought her gone. But a third time she looked up, and clasping her hands across her breast she

[1] The story is told by Professor Drummond.

whispered, "There is no spear-wound here; *He* was wounded for my transgressions; *He* was bruised for my iniquities." Then she passed into the silent land.

"He gave Himself for me": what shall I give to Him?

WAGES OR GIFT?

VII

WAGES OR GIFT?

"The wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."—ROMANS vi. 23.

WHAT is the "eternal life" which is here spoken of? It is endless life, undoubtedly, but it is more than that. The adjective points to something beyond mere duration. This is clear, even if we do not go beyond the verse in which the phrase occurs. In the first place, there is in this verse an obvious parallelism, which may be represented thus:—

The Wages of Sin is Death.	The Gift of God is Eternal Life.

And since it is impossible to explain "death" as meaning nothing more than cessation of being, it is equally impossible to regard "eternal life" as a mere synonym for endless existence. Further, the phrase must be interpreted in the light of the words that follow. And here the Revised Version

renders us, as so often, incalculable service. When we read (as in the Authorised Version) "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," we recognise, as Bishop Westcott says, "A general description of the work of Christ, of what He has wrought for us, standing apart from us." But what Paul really wrote was, "Eternal life *in* Jesus Christ our Lord," that is to say (to quote Westcott again), "Life is not an endowment apart from Christ, it is Himself, and enjoyed in Him." Now we see that the adjective "eternal" is, to speak after the manner of the learned, not quantitative only, but qualitative also; it indicates not endlessness simply, but a certain kind of life, the best and highest kind, life in Christ, the very life of God Himself.

But if this be so, "eternal life" is not a gift for the bestowal of which we must look in the world to come. Not till then, indeed, can it be ours in its fulness, for not till then will the conditions be possible, in which, alone, it can fully manifest itself; but in measure at least it may be ours here and now. We read of one who was dead "*while she liveth*"; but are Sin's dread wages paid on this side the grave, and does God bid us wait till we are beyond it? Nay, verily, "He that hath the Son *hath* the life." What we have may be but the "earnest" of what we are yet to have, but it *is* the earnest, and the "inheritance" itself will be but the earnest multiplied—like it in character, though infinitely greater in degree.

If now we understand something of what is meant by "eternal life," may we not say that this "eternal life" is the salvation which, in the Gospel, is offered to man? Now we are getting in sight of the one truth which I want in this brief address to emphasize. How does this "eternal life" become the possession of man? The answer—the astonishing answer—of Paul is, that (to quote the Revised Version) it is "the free gift of God." The word used by the apostle (*χάρισμα*) means more than "gift"; every gift is not a *χάρισμα*; a *χάρισμα* is a "free gift," a "gift of grace," a gift in which all merit on the part of the receiver is unthought of, and only the free, spontaneous love of the giver is revealed. And it is so, Paul declares, that the eternal life, "the life which is life indeed," comes from God to man.

Now, remember, all Paul's theology was rooted in his experience. That is the secret of its wonderful vitality. "Justification by faith," "sanctification through the Spirit," may be to us mere intellectual counters, the technical terms of a lifeless theology; but to him they were vital processes. And so, when he says, "the free gift of God is eternal life," he is not speculating; he is declaring a fact of experience. He knew that "eternal life," the life of God, was his; and he knew, too, how it had come to him: it was the free gift of God.

Now that is a conception of salvation that nowadays is often lost sight of. Salvation, we

think, is to be from within, it must be wrought out by ourselves, it will come to us only as the last result of long and laborious striving. To many of us to-day religion means, primarily, the straining after a high ideal, the girding of the soul for high endeavour, the marshalling of all life's scattered forces at the blowing of the trumpets of God. Salvation is to be won, not indeed by fastings and penance and self-inflicted tortures—none the less it is to be *won*, and so at last it will be a wage that may be justly demanded, rather than a free gift to be humbly received.

And, of course, there is much in all this that is profoundly true. Where this striving and this high ideal are not, the eternal life is not possible; where they are, even though they be alone, much may be accomplished. But it was not so that Paul conceived the Gospel of Christ. If to us religion's first and greatest word be "strive, endeavour, attain," we are separated from the apostle by a whole diameter; for to him it said, "Humble thyself, and receive." The Gospel was to him—if I may borrow a convenient distinction—not good advice, but good news; it told, first of all, not of something to do, but of something done. No word indicates more clearly the whole drift of Paul's thinking on this matter than the word "grace." By "grace" are we saved; and "grace" speaks not of the doing of man, but of the giving of God. Salvation is not a hard-won

wage paid down by the just Overseer of life; it is the bounty of love, the gift of grace.

Thinking over this text has led me very naturally into speaking in this vein, because if there is one truth which God has of late helped me to see for myself, it is this which I have just been trying to put into words. Of course, I have always believed in what we call salvation by grace, as distinguished from salvation by works; but never until the last few months has the truth really *lived* for me. For years, like so much, alas! of one's theology, it has lain—to use the words of a great writer—in that "dim twilight land that surrounds every living faith; the land not of death, but of the shadow of death—the land of the unrealized and the inoperative." And now that it is beginning to emerge from the darkness, I want others to stand by my side, that, if possible, we may see together the truth that made glad the heart of Paul. I do not speak as a theologian, but as a Christian man to Christian men, eager with them to know the blessedness of eternal life.

If I could sum up in one sentence the difference between these two opposite conceptions of the Christian life to which I have above referred, I think it would be this: the one makes God the centre of religion, the other finds it in man. I do not mean, of course, that this distinction is consciously present to the minds of those who make it, but that, practically, that is what it results in. Are we not in danger of reviving in

religion the blunder of the old astronomy, that made the earth the centre of all things? One of the keenest observers of the trend of religious thought among us to-day has said: "We are making the experiment of how much religion is possible, and how much Christianity is possible without God. We like to have prayers; but prayers without God—prayers full of beautiful and graceful thought concerning human life, full of pathetic representations of the hopes and fears and struggles of men—prayers which are so sympathetic and touching, that they soothe and quiet the heart that listens to them, and make divine comfort unnecessary—prayers which draw us into deeper and closer fellowship with the life of the man who offers them, than with the life of God Himself. We like to sing hymns; but hymns about ourselves, not about God; hymns which tranquillize us by their peacefulness, charm us by their beauty, melt us by their sadness, or animate us with their joy. We like to listen to preaching; but to preaching about man, not about God; about human duty, human suffering, human perplexity, the strength of human virtue, the severity of human temptation." These words may, perhaps, need slight qualification; but no one who knows anything of the life of the Churches to-day will deny that they touch a very real weakness. We often hear it said—and sometimes it is said with something approaching a chuckle—that the old Calvinism is dead. Those who say it have

often no very exact idea of what they mean by "Calvinism," though their rough-and-ready judgment is not without a basis in fact. But Calvinism, in the supreme place it gives to God, in its unwavering insistence that salvation is of God, and not of man, is from without and not from within, can never die. With whatever admixture of doctrinal impurity, in its abiding testimony to these great verities of our faith, it is of imperishable worth. Turn to the *Shorter Catechism* and you will find that the definitions of justification, adoption, and sanctification—"the benefits which they that are effectually called partake of in this life"—all begin with these words: "It is an act of God's free grace." This word "grace" is indeed the characteristic word of Calvinism, and as the writer last quoted has said, there is no word that we need so much to get back, not into our vocabulary simply, but into our thinking and life, as this very word "grace."

Now do not let any of you grow impatient, and tell me that all this may be well enough for divinity students in a theological lecture hall, but that it is out of place in a sermon to busy men and women with little time, and perhaps less inclination, to think seriously about matters of this sort. For so far is this from being a question of purely academic interest, that I do not affirm one whit too much when I say that the whole colour and tone of character of our religious life will be determined by the choice which (consciously or

unconsciously) we make between these opposite conceptions of the meaning of salvation. "I believe," says John Ruskin, "that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has ever suffered, has been the effort of man to earn, rather than to receive his salvation; and that the reason that preaching is commonly so ineffective is, that it calls on men oftener to work for God, than to behold God working for them." Let me close with an illustration or two in confirmation of this.

Why is it that so many of us have so little gladness in our Christian life? Is it not just for this very reason that we have put self instead of God at the centre of it? We have talked and lived as if the whole responsibility of our salvation rested on our own weak shoulders. And since, naturally enough, we doubt our own strength, we are never sure, never at rest; even our joy has the worm of fear busy at the heart of it. "I am persuaded that *I* am able to keep——" We dare not say that; and as we never knew the apostle's noble faith, "*He* is able to keep," we are without any "persuasion" at all; and instead of a ringing certainty, we have only a ghastly fear, or, at best, a tremulous hope. Some of you have seen the little engraving that adorns the title page of Dora Greenwell's beautiful books: a hand grasping a cross, and about it this motto *Et teneo et teneor*, "I both hold and am held." Alas! that so many of us have rent the motto in twain. We remember

that we must hold, but we forget that we are also held, held of God. Let us speak no more as if ours were a religion without God; let us remember that when we have not strength even to cling, He still holds to us; let us dare to believe that Jesus meant what He said when of His sheep He declared, "No one shall snatch them out of My hand."

> "Let me no more my comfort draw
> From my frail hold of Thee,
> In this alone rejoice with awe
> Thy mighty grasp of me."

Why is it, again, that we make so little progress in the Christian life? Why is our love, our trust, so dwarfed and stunted? Again, is not the answer the same? Self is at the centre where only God should be. But the soul never grows by the contemplation of itself. Love cannot be forced like some hot-house plant. It must be set in the light and sunshine of love; then it springs up of itself. Trust grows in the presence of the wholly trustworthy. Therefore, "Look unto *Me*, and be ye saved," must be the law of all our life.

And if once more we ask, Why is it that so many to-day hesitate even to enter upon the Christian life? is not one answer at least this, that they wholly misconceive religion? They are weary and overburdened, and religion seems to add new burdens. How, then, should they seek it? But once again I repeat, Christianity is salvation from without. It tells not of something that man must

do, but of something done for man. "I make known unto you," Paul says, "the gospel which I preached unto you"; and this is it, "I delivered unto you, first of all [*i.e.* among the first things], *how that Christ died for our sins.*" Ah! yes; the Gospel "does not mock the weary with fresh demands for toil; it tells them where they may lean their weariness." It is not another burden it offers, but strength, God's strength, wherewith to carry all our burdens. To all it says, "Believe, and be saved; receive, and be blessed." Shall we not come as humble suppliants, and gladly take the gift He offers?

THE CASTLE OF MANSOUL

VIII

THE CASTLE OF MANSOUL

"*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*"—PROV. iv. 23.

IN John Bunyan's description of the town of Mansoul, with which the *Holy War* opens, we read: "There was reared up in the midst of this town a most famous and stately palace: for strength it might be called a castle; for pleasantness, a paradise; for largeness, a place so copious as to contain all the world. This place the king Shaddai intended but for himself alone, and not another with him; partly because of his own delights, and partly because he would not that the terror of strangers should be upon the town. This place Shaddai made also a garrison of, but committed the keeping of it only to the men of the town." That is Bunyan's pictorial way of putting what he read in his Bible. The Bedfordshire brazier was not what we call a "learned" man, but he had "taken honours" in the Bible and his own heart; and all through his books he speaks

straight out from the fulness of his knowledge on these two great subjects.

By this castle or palace, then, reared up in the midst of the town of Mansoul, Bunyan means the *heart*, and his description of it is just a page out of the Bible, with one of his own inimitable pictures as an illustration. Take, for example, a book like Professor Laidlaw's admirable *Bible Doctrine of Man*, and lay it, with its quiet and sober hues, side by side with the glowing colours of Bunyan's vivid page, and mark how perfectly the two harmonize. "Since, in Bible phrase," writes the professor, "'the life is in the blood,' that organ which formed the centre of the distribution of the blood must have the most important place in the whole system. By a very easy transition, therefore, 'heart' came to signify the seat of man's collective energies, the focus of the personal life. As from the fleshly heart goes forth the blood in which is the animal life, so from the heart of the human soul goes forth the entire mental and moral activity." That is, I believe, a perfectly accurate statement of the meaning of the term "heart" as it is used in the Bible. And it is precisely this same Biblical idea which Bunyan has in mind when he tells us, "There was reared up in the midst of this town a most famous palace," and so forth.

And now, I think, my text needs no further introduction or explanation, and I may use the rest of my time in seeking to enforce it. "Keep thy heart with all diligence"; or, as the words

may be rendered, the better to preserve the emphasis of the original, "Above all that thou guardest, keep thy heart." And as both in the text, and still more manifestly in Bunyan's allegory, the military metaphor is made use of, I shall not hesitate to continue the use of it through what follows.

I

In the first place, then, the heart is *the key of the situation.* He who holds the castle holds Mansoul. To rule there is to rule in the life. As are the "thoughts of the heart," so will be the words of the mouth and the deeds of the hand: out of the heart are "the issues of life."

Do we fully realise this? The late Mr. Cotter Morison said, "There is no remedy for a bad heart, and no substitute for a good one." Thank God, we do know of a remedy for bad hearts; but Cotter Morison was right when he said there was no substitute for a good heart. We are often concerned about what we do and about what we fail to do, but are we half enough concerned about what we *are?* If it is important to ask who holds the outworks, is it not of far greater importance to ask who reigns in the citadel? We do well to be anxious; only let us see to it that our anxiety busies itself at the right point. We need to get farther back. Conduct is the stream, the flowing stream, of our life. Of what avail is it that we seek to cleanse the stream if the fountain-

head be impure? We must go higher up the stream till in the "thoughts of the heart" we reach the very source of life itself.

I may pray with the psalmist, "Let the words of my mouth be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord," but it will be a useless prayer if I do not, like him, go deeper, and lay my finger on "the meditations of my heart." It is right, indeed, to be concerned about the outward man; yet, after all, what Peter calls "the hidden man of the heart" is my real self; and what he is I am. We are to bring "into captivity *every thought* to the obedience of Christ." Was not this same "inwardness" the note of all Christ's teaching? He brushed aside as so many cobwebs the traditions of the elders—"washings of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels"—which rabbinical ingenuity had spun about the life of man, and taught the truth of God in plain and homely speech which he who runs may read. "Hear me, all of you," He said, "and understand: whatsoever from without goeth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it goeth not into his heart, but into his belly, and goeth out into the draught. That which proceedeth out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man." "Thou shalt not kill," said the old commandment: "thou shalt

not commit adultery." "But," we murmur self-complacently, "all these things have I observed from my youth up." But let Christ re-read that ancient law. The murderous thought, He says —that is murder; the adulterous look—that is adultery. Now where do we stand?

Young men, what do we think about? What sort of pictures is Imagination, that great painter whose colours never fade, hanging on the walls of our hearts? "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." "The soul," says Marcus Aurelius, "is dyed the colour of its thoughts." What is going on in our hearts? Are we letting all manner of foul thoughts riot there? Are we giving rein to an unclean imagination? Then, I tell you, the enemy is establishing himself in the very citadel of Mansoul, and after that his possession of the whole town is only a question of time.

That is the true inward history of many a man's fall. That damning deed, which has left its mark on all his after-life—it was not the work of a moment. The terrible lapse into sin is rarely the sudden, unpremeditated thing it sometimes seems. The mind had pictured it, and dwelt upon it, and grown accustomed to it. The train had been laid through long months of unbridled evil thinking, and that deed of shame you see was only the last and visible result of a long unseen and inward process.

Keep your eye fixed full upon the "thoughts of the heart." The evil thought encouraged is

the evil deed begun. Out of the impure thought there issues the impure life. He who cherishes such thoughts is hatching a serpent's brood that will one day wake into life to hiss and sting; he is rearing wild beasts of prey that afterwards will turn upon him and rend him. Slay them at their birth, my brother. Let them have no place in your heart. Pray with all the passion of your being, "Cleanse Thou the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit." "Above all that thou guardest, keep thy heart."

II

How is the heart to be kept?

1. By *watchfulness.* As the older and more familar version puts it, "Keep thy heart *with all diligence.*"

It is the prerogative of man to control himself. In the measure in which we lose that power we lose our manhood. If there be one in whom it is utterly gone, he is no longer a man but an animal. But let us remember, self-control does not mean simply, as I think we sometimes take it to mean, control of our appetites and passions; it includes control of our thoughts. If we say we cannot control our thoughts, then, I repeat, we are no longer men. But such a pitiful confession is really only the worthless plea of the weak man who will not brace himself to make the needed effort.

And assuredly effort is needed. Encamped

around us is a foe whose watchfulness never tires; and if we do not meet him with equal watchfulness we are undone. The town of Mansoul has five gates, and at every gate the watchmen must be posted. Some of us need to keep a strict look-out at Mouth-gate, for still, as Shakespeare says, "men put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains." But the danger for most of us lies perhaps at Eye-gate and Ear-gate. What fools and madmen we are! We know our peril, and yet through these gates enemy after enemy passes unchallenged into the very citadel of the soul. This very week we have read books, or we have looked at pictures, or we have listened to stories that have filled our hearts as with a host of traitors; and even as we sit in God's house their clamour is in our ears, so that we cannot hear the voice of God.

"Look to yourselves." As John wrote to the elect lady, so say I to you: "Look to yourselves." Watch ye. Without vigilance you are lost. As the Pilgrim left the cross, he came on Sloth lying with the irons on his heels between Simple and Presumption, sleeping like a man that sleeps on the top of a mast, and there below—a gulf that hath no bottom! Is not that like some of you? It is said that Alexander used to leave his tent at midnight, and go round the camp and spear to his post any sentinel he found asleep. You must stand sentinel over yourself, my brother; you must keep a sleepless vigil—

"Leave no unguarded place,
No weakness of the soul."

"Above all that thou guardest, keep thy heart."

2. But if the heart is to be kept, it is not enough that we repel the evil intruder; *the heart must be garrisoned with good.* The empty heart is a standing menace, a perpetual invitation to the enemy to attack. That is to say, dropping for a moment the metaphor, our aim should be not merely the repression of evil, but the cultivation of good. The chief end of man is not negative but positive; not so much self-control as self-development. That, at least, is the Christian ideal of life. In the very same breath in which the apostle bids us "die unto sin," he bids us also "live unto God." And however in thought we may separate these two things—the death to sin and the life for God—in reality they are not two, but one; opposite sides of the same great spiritual fact.

God does not want our life to be like some garden, weeded and cleansed indeed, but bare and fruitless. He seeks the blossoming flowers and ripening fruits. And though I cannot claim to be even an amateur gardener, I think I am right when I say that the weeds never thrive so badly as when the ground is well occupied. Certain it is, in our moral life, that evil is only to be finally cast out by good; and there is no good of any kind which, if we welcome it into our hearts, will not be our ally in the day of

battle. He who has learned the delights of music or painting; who likes nothing better than, in Thomas à Kempis' quaint phrase, to sit "in a nook with a book;" or who has found the blessedness of one pure and abiding friendship, has done more to garrison his heart against evil than by all the bolts and barriers he could devise. "Whatsoever things are true, and honourable, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report, think on these things," and they shall be as a troop of white-winged angels, strong as they are fair, to keep the citadel of the heart as a virgin fortress against all the mailed hosts of darkness.

3. Most important of all—and here I go a step beyond my text—if the heart is to be kept, *Christ must reign in it.* "Bringing into captivity every thought *to the obedience of Christ*," wrote Paul; and, after all, all that we can do is little worth if it stop short of that.

Go back again to the words with which I opened: "This place the king, Shaddai, intended but for himself alone, and not another with him; partly because of his own delights, and partly because he would not that the terror of strangers should be upon the town." Mark that last sentence, "Because he would not that the terror of strangers should be upon the town." Will not our own experience interpret that for us? When John Henry Newman was a young man at college, he once wrote home to his mother, in a confidential birthday letter, that when he looked into his own

heart he often shuddered at himself. Have you never shuddered at yourself? Ah, yes! that "terror of strangers upon the town" of Mansoul is a very real thing; and only Christ can deliver us from it. When the strong man armed is in possession, only He Who is stronger than the strong man can cast him out. When, like the temple in the days of old, the heart is polluted and defiled by sin's unholy trafficking, One only is able to cleanse it again. "No remedy for a bad heart"? If you shut Christ out, it is true; bid Him enter, and He will show you straightway how false it is. Oh, give Him the keys of the heart, put Him into possession, and *He* will keep with all diligence the heart, which, with all our keeping, we can never keep.

The castle is His; He built it "for Himself alone." Yet will He never force His way in. If He enter at all, it will be just as another—because we let Him in. The King has committed the keeping of the castle only to the men of the town, and He will never violate His own charter. "Give Me thy heart"—that is how He comes to us. But He will never beat down the door and force an entrance.

"Give Me thy *heart*." He asks for nothing less. He must reign in the citadel, or nowhere. In olden times when an invader besieged our city, he had never conquered Edinburgh till he had subdued the castle. His banners might wave here and there over the city, but not until he had

planted his flag on the summit of the rock was he really victor. And I have never yielded myself to Christ till I have yielded my heart to Him. Do not let us delude ourselves. We read our Bibles and say our prayers; we keep the Sabbath and go to church—that is, we have yielded the outworks to Christ. But what of the citadel? Who is king there? "Give Me thy heart," He says: "give Me thy heart." What shall we answer Him?

"Take my heart, it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

"Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee."

PATIENCE WITH GOD

IX

PATIENCE WITH GOD

"*Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples and said unto Him, Art thou He that cometh, or look we for another?*"—MATTHEW xi. 2, 3.
"*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.*"—PSALM xxxvii. 7.

IT is often very hard for us to be patient with one another. It is harder still sometimes to be patient with ourselves. Hardest of all is it, I think, to be patient with God. It is of this most difficult kind of patience, patience with God, the patience that the Baptist lacked, that I wish to speak for a little time this morning.

I

Now I take it for granted that the Baptist's question was the expression of his own personal doubt. Indeed, I should hardly have thought it necessary to refer to the matter at all, had it not been that certain unimaginative commentators, in their anxiety to save John's credit for consistency,

and at the expense of the plain meaning of the narrative, have sometimes told us that the disciples were sent to Christ, not for the confirmation of John's faith, but of their own. But we have only to read the narrative, whether in Matthew's Gospel or in Luke's, to see how impossible such an interpretation is. It is John who sends the question; it is back to John that Christ sends the answer ("Go your way and tell John"); and the Messiah's words in the sixth verse of this chapter, "Blessed is he whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in Me," seem clearly to point to some fault on the part of the Forerunner.

How, then, are we to explain the Baptist's doubt? The explanation that Matthew gives is at first sight a little curious. We read that when John heard, then he doubted. If it had been that since John did not hear, therefore he doubted, we should not have marvelled. What wonder indeed if, amidst the silent gloom of those prison walls, unbroken by any word of Christ, doubts had sprung up within the Baptist's heart? But it was not the silence, it was the hearing that was the occasion of the doubt. In Luke's narrative this comes out even more distinctly. A report concerning Christ had gone forth through the whole of Judæa, and all the region round about; "and the disciples of John told him of all these things." Then immediately, "John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to the Lord, saying, Art thou He that cometh, or look we for another?"

What then is the explanation of the Baptist's doubt? In order to find the answer we must first remind ourselves of the Baptist's expectations with regard to the Messiah. He had proclaimed the revelation of wrath from heaven; he had declared the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord; even now, it seemed to him, the Judge was at the door. "He that cometh after me," he said, "is mightier than I"; and that conception of the Messiah as the Mighty One, in John's mind seems to have overshadowed almost every other. The old earth was to be cleansed by the baptism not of water but of fire; the axe was to be laid at the very root of the tree of evil; the Messiah was to stand in the midst of the threshing-floor of human life, His fan in His hand, to divide the wheat from the chaff, and to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. To John the coming of the Messiah meant the coming of the kingdom of righteousness, the swift overthrow of the kingdom of evil.

These were John's expectations; but what did he see? Christ had come—so at least he had believed—but where were the signs of His coming? where the axe, the fan, the fire? The adulterous Herod still lorded it in his palace; while here, in the dungeon of the palace, lay the Forerunner of the Messiah a prisoner. Pharisaism, that unclean nest of vipers, was still undisturbed. Where was the promised kingdom? Was it not still as ever it had been—truth upon the scaffold, wrong upon the throne? And Jesus, what is He

doing the while? Healing a few sick folk—so in the prison they told him—raising to life again a widow's son, speaking sweet words of tender grace and love. "This is no Messiah!" said John; "this is no Messiah! Does He think the walls of evil will fall before these soft, piping words of peace? Why does He not have at them? Why, in God's name, does He not smite?" And once more the old warrior spirit leapt within the man: "Oh that these poor bound hands were free again, that I might strike yet one blow more for God and for God's truth!"

And so I think they do the Baptist a grievous wrong who hear, in his doubt, nothing more than a half impatient murmur, because things were going hardly with him, as if his question to Jesus had meant, "If the Messiah has come, why am I left in prison? Why do I suffer? Are others to be healed, and am I only to be forgotten?" No, John's was a larger outlook than that. There are some, I know, who never feel the world-tragedy of evil; but let their own life be touched, and they will curse God and die. The sun may be buried in eclipse, and they will never know it; but blow out the tiny, flickering taper they carry in their own hand, and, lo! their day is turned into night. All things may be out of joint and at cross purposes, and it will be no concern of theirs; but let something get a twist in their own little life, and they will frame an indictment against the universe. When Marie Bashkirtseff learned

that she was smitten with consumption, she wrote in her diary, "Is it I! O God! I! I!! I!!!" And there are some who, in their judgments of God, never get beyond that first personal pronoun ; what happens to *me*—that determines everything.

But John's soul was of a larger build than that. Long ago he had accepted it as the will of God : "He must increase, but I must decrease." What might happen to himself, that was of but little moment ; but was the Kingdom coming? was the Kingdom coming? A blinded, mistaken man if you will—at least it was not selfishness that had led him astray.

And yet John's question was a mistake. For what did it mean? He had said, "If God's kingdom come, it must come *so*." But God's kingdom came not *so*, but *so ;* therefore said John, "The kingdom cometh not all."

"O Son of Man"

he prayed,

"to right our lot,
Naught but Thy presence can avail."

"And yet," he murmured,

"Yet on the road Thy wheels are not,
Nor on the sea Thy sail."

John had not learned to say,

"My how or when Thou wilt not heed ;"

or, to pray,

"Come down Thine own secret stair."

John had forgotten what you and I have so often forgotten—to be patient with God.

II

Turn now for a moment to the psalmist's words, which I read as a kind of second text: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." This man, too, was perplexed. He was confronted by that old problem that vexed the souls of so many of those Old Testament saints, and which finds its sublimest expression in the Book of Job—the problem of the seeming injustice of things, the want of harmony in God's moral universe. "Why," asked these saints of old, "why do the righteous suffer? why does the bad man suffer?" "How long, O Lord, how long?"

This man, I say, had his problem; but he had also the answer to it: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Now I do not say that, as the psalmist meant it, that was an all-sufficient answer. If any one cares to affirm that the psalmist's outlook was bounded by the present life, that all that he meant was, "Wait, wait; all will be well in the end; the wicked shall be destroyed, and the righteous shall be rewarded;" if, I say, any one affirms this, I am not anxious to dispute the point with him. Take what interpretation you will, have we not here in this answer of the psalmist one of those marvellous intuitions of the soul, one of those—to quote Dean Church's

memorable words—"piercing, lightning-like gleams of strange spiritual truth" that have made the Book of Psalms what it is in the hearts and thoughts of men to-day. This man spake a truth greater than he knew. He wrote ages before Christ came, yet Christ Himself cannot make antiquated a word like this. It is one of the ultimate truths of all religion, bearing upon it even in its very form the stamp of a divine finality: "Wait—rest—be patient with God."

III

Our point of view to-day is not precisely either that of the psalmist or of the Baptist. The world changes, and with it the thoughts of men. One generation falters where another trod with firm and certain feet. Yet be our problems what they may, the old answer is still valid, and it is still the best: "Rest in the Lord; wait patiently for Him." Is not this a word to lay upon our hearts in days like these, when the current of impatient unbelief runs so often swift and strong?

I think we understand well enough the Baptist's feeling. Like him, we, too, have prayed that God would quicken His steps among the stars; yet still He seems to tarry, till wondering impatience cries aloud, "Why does He not hear us? Why does He not make an end of sin? If He be the Lord, why does He not make haste to save us and our poor devil-hunted world?" Was it not

this that led even the sweet and gentle Whittier to say once, as he fought for the down-trodden slave of America, "I confess when I think of the atrocities of slavery, I am almost ready to call for fire from heaven." And I have heard of one who, when speaking of the desolations wrought in our own fair land by the thrice accursed drink traffic, cried in one passionate outburst, "Oh, if only I were God Almighty for ten minutes!" It is this —"the godless look of earth," as Faber calls it— that tries our faith far more than "our mysterious creed"—

> "Ill masters good: good seems to change
> To ill with greatest ease;
> And worst of all, the good with good
> Is at cross purposes."

And amid it all

> "He hides himself so wondrously,
> As though there were no God;
> He is least seen when all the powers
> Of ill are most abroad."

And this it is that stirs our doubt and quickens our impatience till we are ready to ask, "Is God as man and could not if He would?"

"*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Fret not thyself because of evil-doers. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass.*"

Does some one say, "Well, but patience cures nothing. It is not idle waiters the world wants, but earnest workers. Surely we have waited long

enough, and the time for doing has come"? True, true; but let us make no mistake. Patience with God does not mean one moment's truce in the war with evil. A man may fold his arms and lie back in his easy-chair to dream idly of a good time that is coming, and he may call that "patient waiting for God"—he may; God calls it by another and a very different name. Let not that man think he shall receive anything from the Lord, save indeed it be His rod, His frown, His hot thunderbolts. No; patient waiting is not a substitute for earnest praying or faithful doing; it is rather—if I can put it in one sentence—the spirit, the atmosphere, in which alone are possible the prayer that prevails, the toil that never flags nor tires.

IV

Let me show you in a word or two how this patience justifies itself.

1. In the first place, to put it negatively, *impatience never forms a true estimate of evil.* Sometimes it over-estimates it, sometimes it under-estimates it—I hardly know which is worse—but it never rightly estimates it. It creates an atmosphere in which everything is blurred and distorted, which never allows us to see things as they really are. There is a very instructive incident in the life of Ahaz king of Israel preserved for us in the Book of Isaiah. Syria and Ephraim had formed a confederacy against him, and the

king was in great fear: "His heart was moved and the heart of his people as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind." Then the prophet is sent unto him, and his first word is this: "Take heed and be quiet"; as long as you are in this flurry and flutter you will do nothing right—keep yourself still. Then when he has quieted the fears of the frightened king he bids him look the facts in the face. These his enemies—Ephraim and Syria—that are causing him to quake, what are they? "two stumps of smoking firebrands!" "The head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin"—is he worth fearing? "And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son"—is he worth fearing? "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."[1]

Is not this word of the prophet the very word that we need to hear to-day in face of our modern problems and difficulties? "Take heed and be quiet; keep your eyes open and your heart still; and do not get into panic." Why, you have but to mention in some men's hearing "Socialism" or "the Higher Criticism," and they lose their heads straightway. The advent of a new idea affects them as the confederacy of Ephraim and Syria affected Ahaz; "after that the deluge," they think. Until you can quieten them you can do nothing with them, and they will do nothing but

[1] I follow Dr. George Adam Smith's admirable rendering of this incident.

mischief. "If I had the power," said wise John Foster once, "of touching a large part of mankind with a spell, it should be this short sentence, *Be quiet—be quiet.*"

2. Impatience, I say, never rightly estimates the evil it wants to deal with; and in the second place, *it always misses the remedy.* Some one has pointed out the contrast between the calmness and sagacity of General Gordon in the presence of the gigantic slave traffic in Africa and the crude, hasty, well-meaning, but mistaken suggestions of philanthropists at home. What was the explanation? Gordon believed that God's hand was upon even this iniquity, that even of this hideous trafficking in flesh and blood God had said, "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther"; and in that faith he could wait and watch and plan, till he saw the way clearly, which others in their impatience would never find.

Again, I ask, is there not a lesson here for the Church of Christ? We behold, as in a vision, the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, and we long for the day when they shall be the kingdom of our Christ; and in a moment the Evil One is at our side: "All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." And some of us, alas! are paying the price. Every now and again an African traveller comes home and assures us that the reports of foreign missionary work are exaggerated, that if we saw things as they see them we should not believe all

we hear, that—you know the rest. Well, we take all that with a pretty big pinch of the proverbial salt: if we have to make our choice between the "report" of the missionary and the "report" of the traveller, some of us at any rate will not be long in making up our minds. But, perhaps, there is just enough truth in the traveller's depreciation of missionary work to give us a not unneeded warning. Who is to blame if missionary statistics sometimes creep ahead of actual facts?[1] Not the missionary abroad, but Christians at home, who will only give where they can get "something in return for their money." You have a guinea a year to give—to whom shall you give it? "How much do your converts cost per head?" "Six and eightpence." "And yours?" "We cannot tell you; we have spent thousands, and as yet there is little to show." And the six-and-eightpenny man gets your guinea. And then you wonder if twice in a generation missionary returns get into print that will not bear a scrutiny! I say, it is you who are responsible for them. And the root of the evil is just here—we cannot be patient with God; He moves too slowly for us; and so with impious hands we seek to hasten Him on.

I have seen the same thing in an inquiry-room at the close of an evangelistic service. Here

[1] Need I say, I am only referring to a missionary's work on one side of it? The best of it, like the best of all Christian work, can never be scheduled.

is a man seeking salvation; by his side kneels another who has found the peace of God. "Why should not you know it too," he urges, "here, now, before we rise from our knees?" In nine cases that may be the right method; but in the tenth, another's eager haste may hurry a man faster than he can go, till he is persuaded into admitting that he feels what he does not feel, that he believes what he does not believe. If Christian men sometimes almost break their hearts over what happens when the "Special Mission" is over, and the revivalist has gone on his way rejoicing, perhaps the reason lies somewhere there. We will not learn to be patient with God.

3. And in the end—howsoever sharp her trials meanwhile may be—patience shall be justified. *The Lord reigneth;* therefore ought men to work and to pray, and not faint. *The Lord reigneth;* therein is the vindication of our patient waiting.

> "This fine old world of ours is but a child
> Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time
> To learn its limbs: there is a hand that guides."

Alas! we forget the hand that guides. The noise of the water-floods is in our ears, that we cannot hear the voice of Him that sitteth as King above the floods. Still the old cry goes up to heaven: "How long, O Lord! how long before Thou come again?"

> "Still in cellar and in garret and on moorland dreary,
> The orphans moan, and widows weep, and poor men toil in vain."

And still does the answer come back to us:

"Blind! I live, I love, I reign; and all the nations through
With the thunder of my judgments even now are ringing."

"Be patient; stablish your hearts; the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

Sometimes when days are dark and hearts are sad we whisper to ourselves of things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, which have not entered into the heart of man, prepared of God for them that love Him. But is it not well also to remember that in the Old Testament prophecy, of which Paul's great words are an echo, the promise of the revelation of these things is not to them that "love," but unto them that "wait"? "It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God." "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord."

THE IMITATION OF JESUS

X

THE IMITATION OF JESUS

"I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you."—JOHN xiii. 15.

I HAVE here a small, unpretentious-looking volume that you may buy at almost any bookshop for a few pence. And yet, with the exception of the Bible, it is probably the most remarkable book in the world. It was written by a Roman Catholic in the dark, bad days before Luther came; yet Protestants by the thousand read it without once stopping to ask what the writer's creed was. It was written nearly five hundred years ago; and yet no one feels it old—except as the sunshine is old, and the stars, and the spring flowers. The man who wrote it lived for seventy-one years in a monastery, where nothing ever happened; and we who read it are in a big, busy world, full of loud voices and stirring activities; and yet so it is, that when we put back the thick octavo on the shelf, and the long rows have nothing to say to us, this tiny volume brings its

own quiet message of unfailing strength and hope. And the reason is not far to seek: this little book speaks not to Catholic or to Protestant, not to the fourteenth or to the nineteenth century, but to the universal heart, to all centuries and to all men: it is *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis.

When I say that À Kempis speaks to the universal heart, I am using no mere figure of speech; I am stating a simple fact of history. With the one exception of the Bible, the *Imitation* has probably had a wider circulation than any book in the world. In this respect even the *Pilgrim's Progress* has to take second place; for, while the picture of "Giant Pope" in Bunyan's allegory must naturally give offence to the devout Catholic, the *Imitation*, as I have said, is read by Catholic and Protestant alike. The little book weaves its spell about lives that have scarce one thought or feeling in common. One of John Wesley's first publications was an edition of Â Kempis. Voltaire once, in a chance moment, read the book, "and the presence passed into his soul, and found a lodging in one tiny corner, whence no sneering scepticism could banish it." Every reader of *The Mill on the Floss* knows with what a strange thrill of awe George Eliot first listened to this voice out of the far-off Middle Ages; the book became her life-long companion; it was on her pillow by her side when she died. And General Wolseley—to take but one example more—has told us that when he sets out on some

long military expedition, between his Book of Common Prayer and his Soldiers' Pocket-Book, goes his *Imitatio Christi*.

What manner of man was this in whom men so different have found delight so great? Here is a little portrait of him, etched by a loving disciple's hand:—"A little, fresh-coloured man, with soft brown eyes, short-sighted, with a knack of stealing away quietly to his *cubiculum* when the conversation grew lively; somewhat bent in the shoulders; who stood upright when the psalms were chanted, and even rose and fell on his tiptoes, with his face glancing upwards; genial, if somewhat shy, and given to making small puns. He liked psalms better than salmon, he used to say; but he liked best of all 'little books and quiet nooks.' He wrote a little book *On Charity*—systematic giving, we should call it—and his fellow-monks made him receiver of doles for the monastery; but he was too 'found of contemplation'—which, I suppose, is the fifteenth-century phrase for being absent-minded—and the brethren had to depose him. He did not know what an event meant. Only two incidents stand out in his ninety years of vegetating: once a man fell into the convent well, and Thomas cannot find words enough to praise the ready skill and daring of the monk who threw off his cloak, and letting it drop within grasp, pulled the drowning man out. That was the man who has made himself part of so many thousand lives."

Is Thomas à Kempis on your bookshelf? No? Then give him a place there before you are twenty-four hours older. And when you have the book, do not "dip into it" merely; make it your daily friend; and if this volume do nothing more than introduce you to the wise, deep words of this holy man of God, you will give thanks all your days that you read it.

But, after all, the real subject of this brief address is not Thomas à Kempis, but Thomas à Kempis' Lord, and its chief aim is not so much to urge the study of a book, but rather the imitation of a Person. Now, I grant that "imitation" is not the first nor the last, nor the deepest word of the Christian Gospel. Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, the imitation of Jesus is itself possible only as a result of some more vital process. Nevertheless, imitation has its place among the Christian duties: "Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children," says St. Paul; "imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ." The Thessalonians, he says, "became imitators of us and of the Lord." And even where the word is not used, the same truth is often taught: "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus"; "he that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked"; "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow His steps." And when Paul and John and Peter say these things, they do but repeat what their Master had said before them: "I have given you

an example that ye also should do as I have done to you."

But it is necessary to understand a little more clearly in what sense Christ is our example. The necessity is emphasized by the incident — the washing of the disciples' feet—in connection with which the words of Christ just quoted were spoken. It is on the act of Christ's therein described that the Roman Catholic Church grounds its custom of the "feet-washing" on the day known in its calendar as "Maundy Thursday," that is, the Thursday of Passion Week. But is the observance of this custom exactly what Christ desired when He said, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you"? Take another example. Every one has heard the legend of St. Francis of Assisi, how that, praying in an ecstasy of devotion, it was granted unto him to receive into his body—his hands, his feet, his side—the marks of the dying of the Lord Jesus. Is it to a likeness to Christ after that fashion that we are called? Or put it in yet another way. It is sometimes said by those who do not believe that the New Testament gives any sanction to the principles of total abstinence, "But Christ Himself was not an abstainer; He made wine at Cana of Galilee; He drank it with His disciples in the upper room at Jerusalem." Quite so; and I suppose that, like every other Jew, Jesus would wear a turban on His head, and sandals on His feet; and we know that He was never married.

But if a man to-day should remain single, and prefer a turban to a hat, and sandals to boots, would any one be so foolish as to argue that therefore he was the more Christlike?

Clearly, then, it is of little use to say that Christ is our Example if we do not understand in what sense He is our Example. Now, the great fact to be kept steadily in mind is this, that the standard of life set before us in the New Testament is to be found not in a code of laws, but in a *character*. "We are called," says Dean Church, "to the study of a living Person, and the following of a living Mind." It is not the letter, but the spirit of Christ's life which is binding upon us. Unfortunately, that has often been interpreted to mean no obligation at all; none the less, the distinction is a valid one. Ours is not the impossible task of slavishly copying line by line, and detail by detail, the life of Jesus. The difference in the external circumstances of our lives and His alone would make that impossible. "Have this *mind* in you which was also in Christ Jesus," and the rest can be left to take care of itself.

Two or three years ago a well-known journalist wrote a book entitled, *If Jesus Christ came to Chicago*. Many took exception alike to the answer and to the form of the question. I have nothing to do with either just now; but this I will say, that until we ask not only what did Jesus do eighteen hundred and fifty years ago, under circumstances wholly differing from our own, but also,

what would Jesus do if He were here in my place to-day, we are not even within sight of a right interpretation of His life, or of the application of that life to the life of to-day. To live so that Jesus "would approve our life"—I quote John Stuart Mill's well-known words—is the only imitation of Him that is worthy of the name.

Do I need to spend one moment in proving, or rather in affirming, Christ to be the Perfect Example? Alone of all the sons of men He was without sin. "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." He could look up to heaven and declare, "I do always the things that please Thee." He could turn to His enemies and ask, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" The claim is still undisputed; the challenge is still unanswered; and when His own apostle Peter declares "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth," the whole world writes its "Amen" under the great affirmation. But the "sinlessness of Jesus"—to borrow a phrase of the theologians—is altogether too negative a term adequately to express the perfect symmetry of the character of Christ. His was a perfection full-orbed and complete, lacking nothing. We speak sometimes of the "characteristics" of great men, meaning the particular excellences in which they shine pre-eminent. But who can name the "characteristics" of Jesus? I have preached on "The Manliness of Jesus," and I have preached on "The Womanliness of Jesus," and I believe that both terms can be

justified. What we call the manly virtues, and what we call the womanly virtues, all meet in Him. With the erring disciple, with the bad man turning from his badness, with all that are more sinned against than sinning, He is gentle, tender, beseeching as a mother with her child. But to the self-seeker, the hypocrite, the oppressor, He is clad with severity as with a cloak: on these and such as these His words fall like flakes of burning lava. Yet He is never "in a passion"; no dark fumes of hate mingle with the clear, bright flame of His indignation against sin. How in Him, too, the life of action and the life of contemplation meet! The cloistral smell, the monastic gloom, the continuous turning-in of the soul upon itself, that sometimes offend us in the pages of the *Imitation*, are nowhere to be found in the record of the Perfect Life. And when over and above all this we remember how manifold, notwithstanding the limitation imposed by His divine nature, were the relations of our life into which He entered we begin to realize how worthy He is to stand for ever as the world's great Example.

How, then, can we imitate Christ? How can we become like Him?

(1) If we would grow like Christ we must know what Christ was like. A very simple, obvious thing to say, and yet a thing that needs to be said; for how many of us do really know even yet what Christ was like? To your Gospels! ye churchmen and churchwomen, to your Gospels!

One meeting a week less and one chapter a week more may not be a rule for everybody, but there are multitudes of Christian people in whose spiritual health that simple change of diet, honestly followed out, would soon work wonders.

(2) If we would grow like Christ we must keep Him steadily before us. Did you ever watch a child taking a lesson in model-drawing? —never two strokes of the pencil without a glance at the model. And the first law and the last law of the imitation of Christ is just this—"looking unto Jesus." We must fix our eyes upon Him; we must hold Him steadily in our hearts and in our minds, until just as the sunlight prints the object on the sensitized plate of the camera, so we "*beholding* are transformed into the same image from glory to glory." Supernatural? Yes, and yet very natural too. You remember the child of the grief-stricken Margaret, in Wordsworth's lovely poem—

> "Her infant babe
> Had from its mother caught the trick of grief,
> And sighed among its playthings."

We grow like those we live with, those we love; every day beholding we are transformed; and the same law holds here. If we are so little like Christ, is it not because we are so little with Him?

We must be with Christ, we must learn what He is like—is that all? is there no more to be said? Then can I never be like Him. His

is the perfect example, I know. I follow that life through all "the sinless years that breathed beneath the Syrian blue," till my whole soul throbs with the wonder of it. But imitate it —how can I, I with my weakened will, my besetting sins? "He left us an example," says Peter, the headline for life's copybook;[1] but my hand is trembling and palsied—how shall it trace the fair characters? "Imitate Him"? It is too high for me; I cannot attain unto it. How shall these weak, stumbling feet ever climb that fearful steep?

There is the great problem, not the ideal, but its realization. That is the test which has brought system after system to the ground. The world had its ideals before Christ came; men were not perishing for lack of good examples; the trouble was, they were powerless to reach them. To lift the ideal as Christianity has done, and to do nothing more, is only to leave us in worse plight than ever. Therefore the more imperative does the old question become—How shall I become that which afar off I see and admire? And if Christianity cannot answer, it will pass, as other systems before it have passed.

Thank God, it can answer. He Who is our Example is also our New Life. Why—if I may

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 21, ὑπογραμμός: "*a writing-copy*, including all the letters of the alphabet, given to beginners as an aid in learning to draw them."—Grimm's *Lexicon*.

borrow an illustration of Dr. Stalker's—is the child like the mother? Because the child watches the mother, and consciously imitates her? Partly so, but chiefly because the child's life is the mother's life, because the mother lives in her child. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and His people. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith," that "Christ may be formed in you": it was the prayer of one who himself had learned to say, "I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me," and it is the purpose of God. Here verily, if not the first, is at least the last and the deepest word of the Christian Gospel. It is the indwelling Christ Who alone can make possible the *Imitatio Christi.*

THE IDYLLS OF BETHLEHEM

XI

THE IDYLLS OF BETHLEHEM

A CHRISTMAS SERMON

"*Let us go now even unto Bethlehem.*"—LUKE ii. 15.

SO said the shepherds one to another on that first Christmas eve, when they had heard the message of the angels, and had seen the shining glory round about them. Shall we follow them? For Christmas has come again, and once more the thoughts of men everywhere are turning to that little village far away on the uplands of Judæa.

Lovely stories cluster about the little place, stories of simple human joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, loves and disappointments,—stories that carry us far back into the dim past, and, above all, the "old, old story" of how, in the city of David, there was born unto us a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. I want us to listen to some of these stories now. We have all read—sometimes with laughter, sometimes with tears, always with

delight—what so many recent writers have told us of the humour, the pathos, the tragedy to be found under the humblest peasant's roof, idylls of Lisconnel, of Troy Town, of Galloway, of Drumtochty, of Thrums: to-day we will listen to the idylls of Bethlehem.

There, on a narrow limestone ridge, some five miles south of Jerusalem, and two or three thousand feet above the level of the sea, lies the straggling village with its flat-roofed houses. The lofty tableland of Judæa is, for the most part, stony and barren. But about Bethlehem the land is fertile; sheep pasture on the long rolling uplands, and on the terraced slopes of its valleys grow the olive, the vine, and the fig-tree. The village is called sometimes Bethlehem, sometimes Ephrath, and once by the double name Bethlehem-Ephrathah. Both names bear witness to the fertility of the neighbourhood: "Ephrath" means "fruit," Bethlehem, "house of bread."

I

Just outside the village, on the main road that runs from Bethel in the north to Hebron in the south, stands a little domed dwelling, dear alike to Christians, Jews, and Mussulmans. It is around this spot that our first story centres; for here is the grave of Rachel, the wife of Jacob.

The patriarch had journeyed as far as Bethel, according to the command of the Lord; and there

Deborah, the old nurse of his mother, died; and Jacob buried her under "the oak of weeping." It was a heavy blow, for it was the snapping of one of the few ties with the past that were still left to him. But a still heavier blow was yet to fall. From Bethel Jacob moved towards Bethlehem, but ere he reached it, when just within sight of its walls, Rachel's child was born; Rachel herself was dead. "And as her soul was in departing," she whispered, "Call him Benoni, the son of my sorrow." "So Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath. And Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; the same is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day."

That day scored its lines deep in Jacob's memory. Long years after, when the old man lay upon his deathbed, and Joseph, Rachel's child, and Joseph's children, stood by him to receive his last blessing, he lived it all through again. "As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when there was still some way to come unto Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath."

Ah, me! how like our life to-day is to life in those far-off days! The years have grown to centuries, and the centuries to millenniums; but, with whatever changes, in all its deepest things our life remains the same. Birth and death, sorrow and pain, love and joy, these are with us still; and when we think of Jacob in his lonely

grief there within sight of the walls of Bethlehem, the intervening years are gone, and we are one with him; for we, too, have drunk of the cup whereof he drank; we, too, have been baptized with that baptism wherewith he was baptized.

II

But the stories of Bethlehem are not all sad. Listen to this one.

It was in the days of the Judges, and the famine was sore in the land. Driven, perhaps, by want, a man of Bethlehem and his wife—Elimelech and Naomi by name—and their two sons went to dwell in the land of Moab, the country that you see as you look across the awful gorge of the Dead Sea to the long line of purple hills that shuts in the land of Palestine on its eastern side. And it came to pass that Elimelech died; his sons married, but they also died, and the three widowed women—Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah—were left together in one home.

But Naomi could not rest. Every night she could see the sun set behind her loved Judæan hills; the famine they told her was over, and she longed for home. "Go," she said to her daughters-in-law, "return each of you to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me." Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and returned unto her own kinsfolk; but Ruth clave unto her. "Intreat

me not to leave thee," she said, "or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." "The most beautiful confession of love in all the world," says Dr. Whyte; "the world has nothing after Ruth's confession of her love like it." And he is right.

The rest of the story every child knows; how Ruth, gleaning for her mother-in-law and herself, her hap was to light on the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, one of her own kinsmen, and how

> "When, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn,"

Boaz himself saw her, and spake kindly unto her, and afterwards took her to be his wife. Then the glad day came, when Naomi's old arms carried a little child once more; and the women, her neighbours, rejoiced with her, saying, "Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a near kinsman, and let his name be famous." And they called his name Obed; and Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David. And so the fair Moabitess has her place in that long line of which, in the fulness of time, was born Jesus, which is called Christ.

III

From the story of Ruth to the next chapter in these village idylls the step is natural and easy; for it was after Ruth's great-grandchild that Bethlehem came to be known as "the city of David."

And yet at the first little David seems to have been of but small account in the big family of Jesse the Bethlehemite. When one memorable day the aged prophet Samuel came at the command of the Lord to the house of Jesse to anoint one as king over Israel, it was not until seven sons had passed before him, and of each in turn the Lord had declared, "neither hath the Lord chosen this," and the prophet had asked, "Are here all thy children?" that Jesse seemed to bethink him of David at all. But when the ruddy youth stood before him, then the divine voice bade the prophet "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." So was David "taken from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, to feed Israel according to the integrity of his heart, and to guide them by the skilfulness of his hands." And if those old walls could speak, what stories they could tell us of the days that followed, when David came to be at once the hero of a hundred fights and Israel's sweetest singer! One such has been preserved, and it is too good to be forgotten.

David was hiding in the cave of Adullam. Anointed king as he was, he had not yet come to his own; his life was rather that of an outlaw chieftain hiding among the hills. Suddenly a fierce longing seized him. "Oh," he cried, "that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" The day was hot; overhead a fierce sun beat down; but it was not water simply that David longed for—it was water from Bethlehem; he was not thirsty only, he was homesick.

Now let the heart interpret. Once again, I think, the intervening years have vanished, and we are by David's side. Do we not know that heart-hunger? Some one who hears me to-day, perhaps, is spending his first Christmas away from home. What pictures crowd in upon the memory! You have only to shut your eyes for a moment, and though it be in Princes Street, in a flash you can see it all: the little village in some Highland glen, or English shire, or among the hills of Wales—the home, the friends, the cheery welcome.

Scotch people do not make much of Christmas, but no one understands the feeling for home better than they. You remember Alan Breck, a wanderer in exile, but every year finding his way back to Scotland. "France is a braw place, nae doubt," he said, "but I weary for the deer and the heather." And Stevenson himself, driven by our harsh winds to a sunnier land, has told us that

the words that went to his heart like no others were these :—

> "It's ill to loose the bands that God decreed to bind ;
> Still will we be the children of the heather and the wind,
> Far away from home, O it's still for you and me,
> That the bloom is blowing bonnie in the north countrie."

And among the last words that came from his pen was this prayer—a prayer, alas ! never to be answered—

> "Be it granted me to behold you again in dying,
> Hills of home !"

It is this Old Testament story over again : "Oh, that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate !"

The sequel is soon told. Three brave fellows overheard their chieftain's wish. They were strong of hand and stout of heart. Many a fierce brush with the enemy had they had. One of them could remember how that once he had fought until his stiffened hand clave to his sword. To-day Bethlehem was in the hands of Philistines ; it was twelve miles as the crow flies to the little white town on the ridge, and their path lay through a country intersected with deep ravines, where at any point their foes might lurk in ambush. It looked like certain death, but they never hesitated. Up the steep limestone cliffs they clambered, till the well was reached, the water was drawn, and they were back once more

at the cave in safety. And now one begins to understand the deathless devotion that bound these rough, wild men to their outlawed leader; the water was in his hands, but "he would not drink thereof"—bought at such a price it was too sacred. "Shall I drink the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" he said; "be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this." And in the presence of them all he poured it out as an offering unto the Lord.

IV

Three hundred years and more pass by and we hear of Bethlehem again. It was in the days of Isaiah. In an obscure village on the other side of the great watershed of Judæa, in that No-man's land where Philistines and Israelites so long contended for the mastery, lived Micah the prophet. He was a simple countryman and a son of the people; and he knew the people's wrongs, not merely because, like Isaiah, he had seen them, but because he had suffered them. He speaks as one into whose soul the iron had entered. In sharp, piercing sentences he lays bare the iniquity of the land: "The judges judge for reward"; "the priests teach for hire"; "the prophets divine for money"; Zion is cemented with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. And for all these things cometh the swift judgment of Jehovah: "there-

fore shall Zion be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps."

But if to-day was dark the morrow was bright with hope; a Deliverer should yet arise to save his people. And once again the prophet's eyes turned towards the house of David. It was under him that Israel had enjoyed its golden age; and when the present like a hideous nightmare had vanished, it was in a descendant of him that Israel should recover her lost glory. "Thou, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. . . . And he shall stand, and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God: and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."

V

Now I come to our last story about Bethlehem; and if there had not been this to tell, you and I would not have been here to-day to listen to the others.

The centuries rolled by, the darkness grew deeper, the voice of prophecy was silent, and still its great word was unfulfilled. The yoke of the foreigner lay heavy upon the neck of the chosen people. Here and there devout souls waited, cherishing the hope that they should not see death till

they had seen the Lord's Christ. But, for the most part, the people sat in darkness and the shadow of death. Then it was that through the tender mercy of our God, the Day-spring from on high visited us; and on the plains of Bethlehem there fell the first gleams of that holy light which was to guide men's feet into the way of peace. "And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Then said the shepherds one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger."

Every one knows how much the art and imagination of the Christian poet and painter have done for that scene: they have made that manger-cradle bright with an unearthly light; they have sung to us how that

> "All about the courtly stable
> Bright-harness'd angels sat in order serviceable."

For once, I wish them all away. To me the plain simplicity of the Gospel story is more

beautiful than any adornment can be; to add here is really to subtract. Better than them all I like one who sings—

> "They all were looking for a king
> To slay their foes and lift them high:
> Thou cam'st, a little baby thing
> That made a woman cry."

"Let *us* go unto Bethlehem." And there, what is it that we see and hear? This is the beginning of a wonderful history; but it is more than that—it is the beginning of a Gospel: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born unto you this day a *Saviour*."

How do we stand to this Gospel? "This child," said Simeon—and there was a flash of divine insight in the old eyes before they closed for ever in death—"is set for the falling and rising up of many in Israel." It was true then; it is true still. What is this Christ to you? Even in His cradle He divides men. One there was, Herod, who came only to kill and to destroy; some there were, in the inn, careless and indifferent, knowing nothing of what was going on so near them; and some there were who came from afar to worship and adore. With whom are we this Christmas day?

"O come let us adore Him"; let us seek Him, for we need Him; for this is He, Jesus, given to save His people from their sins.

A RAVELT HASP

XII

A RAVELT HASP[1]

WE are come to the last Sunday of another year. That in itself should be enough to set us thinking without many words of mine. Shallow-minded persons may mock at the seriousness with which we are wont to watch the passing of the old year and the coming of the new; they may tell us that our divisions of time are wholly arbitrary, that there is nothing in reality corresponding to what we speak of as the turning of a new corner, the opening of a new chapter in our life; that, indeed, the whole business is only one of those foolish imaginings with which we are wont to delude our foolish selves. Be it so. For my part, I am thankful for anything that will make a break in the even flow of my years, anything that will bid me cast a look back upon the road by which I have come, and forward on the way that still lies before me—anything that will help me to remember what is no foolish

[1] Preached on the last Sunday evening of the year.

delusion, but a great sober and sobering fact, that "when a few years are come, I shall go the way whence I shall not return." And so, perhaps, as "a verse may find him who a sermon flies," the season to-day may "find" some of us whom the preacher would fail to touch.

For once, though I hope I shall say nothing that is not perfectly scriptural, I venture to go outside Scripture for my text. In that beautiful and far too little known volume of essays, Alexander Smith's *Dreamthorp*, there is one chapter named "A Shelf in my Bookcase," in which, in his own delightful fashion, the author chats about some of his favourite books. On that shelf in my bookcase—for I suppose every book lover has such a shelf—stands David Gilmour's *Pen Folk and Paisley Weavers*, a book which only one reader here and there has ever heard of, but for which those who have discovered it do not fail to give thanks. One of Gilmour's weavers shall give us our text to-night: "The Lord'll fin' mine a ravelt hasp," says Henry Buchan; "it was sairly disordered, I whiles think, or it cam my length; but He has the hank in's ain han', an' maun dae wi' me as it pleases Himsel'."

From David Gilmour I turn to Samuel Rutherford. This is how he writes to William Gordon of Earlston, or Earlston the younger, as he is sometimes called—he it was who fell fighting at Bothwell Bridge, who has an honourable place in John Howie's long gallery of "Scots Worthies,"

and of whom many of us have been reading lately in Mr. Crockett's *Men of the Moss Hags*. "Twenty times a day," writes Rutherford, "I ravel my heaven, and then I must come with my ill-ravelled work to Christ, to cumber Him (as it were) to right it, and to seek again the right end of the thread, and to fold up again my eternal glory with His own right hand, and to give a right cast of His holy and gracious hand to my marred and spilled salvation. Certainly it is a cumbersome thing to keep a foolish child from falls, and broken brows, and weeping for this and that toy, and rash running, and sickness, and bairns' diseases; ere he wins through them all, and wins out of the mires, he costeth meikle black cumber and fashery to his keepers. And so is a believer a cumbersome piece of work, and an ill-ravelled hasp (as we used to say) to Christ. But God be thanked; for many spilled salvations, and many ill-ravelled hasps hath Christ mended since first He entered Tutor to lost mankind." Thus far Samuel Rutherford. Now hear Rutherford's best interpreter, our neighbour and friend, Dr. Alexander Whyte: "Rutherford told young Earlston how terribly he had 'ravelled his own hasp' in the days of his youth; and he tells another of his correspondents that, after eighteen years, he was not sure he had even yet got his ravelled hasp put wholly right. Young Edinburgh gentlemen who have been born with the silver spoon in their mouth will not understand what a ravelled hasp is. But those

who have been brought up at the pirn-wheel in Thrums, and in such like hand-loom towns, have the advantage of some of their fellow-worshippers to-night. They do not need to turn to Dr. Bonar's Glossary or to Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary to find out what a ravelled hasp is. They well remember the stern yoke of their youth, when they were sent supperless to bed because they had ravelled their hasp, and all the old times rush back on them as Rutherford confesses to Earlston how recklessly he ravelled his hasp when he was a student in Edinburgh, and how, twenty times a day, he still ravels it after he is Christ's prisoner in Aberdeen. When the hasp is ravelled the pirn is badly filled, and then the shuttle is choked and arrested in the middle of its flight, the web is broken and knotted and uneven, and the weaver is dismissed, or, at best, he is fined in half his wages. And so," said Rutherford, "it is with the weaver and the web of life, when a man's life-hasp is ravelled in the morning of his days."

Here, then, we have got both text and exposition; and though both perhaps are rather long, no one, I think, could wish them shorter, for they have given us all something to ponder on this last Sunday evening of the old year.

I

"Mine is a ravelt hasp," says Henry Buchan; "twenty times a day," says Samuel Rutherford,

"I ravel my heaven." Now, before we go further, let me ask: Do you ever examine yourself like that? Do you ever take stock of yourself after that fashion? Did you ever sit down some New Year's eve, before the clock had chimed the midnight hour, and instead of joining in the festivity and merry-making, find out how things were going with your own soul? Do you ever talk with yourself, hold a dialogue with your own heart, probing it with sharp, lancet-like questions? "The hidden man of the heart"—have you ever got face to face with him? "God opens a very wonderful book for our instruction," says Fénelon, "when He sets us reading our own hearts." You have read newspapers and novels in abundance this year; how often have you looked into that other book? You are an eager man of business, and this year has taught you many of its secrets, and given you a feeling of certainty such as you never had before amid its intricate paths. That is well; but your *self*—do you know it any better? have you mastered any of its hidden secrets? Or you are interested keenly in the course of public affairs, and you have watched every move of the nations down to this unhappy American crisis, and the sad trouble in the Transvaal; yes, but do you know, too, how it fares in the ceaseless struggle nearer home, in that vast empire that we call "myself"? Or, perhaps, you are a student at our university, and this year in the class-room you have studied the structure of the human frame,

you have learned how fearfully and wonderfully man is made; but did you ever stand like a surgeon over yourself on the dissecting-table, till those "hidden parts" wherein God desireth truth lay open to your gaze? This physical structure—this blood and bone and tissue—this is not *me*, it is only the house I live in. Can it be that you have given a whole year to the study of the house, and not one hour to the tenant who dwells in it? "I am a large diocese to myself," says the good archbishop I quoted a moment ago, "more overwhelming than the external one;" and yet, alas! with most of us, the external diocese gets a hundred thoughts where the inner scarce gets one.

I do not forget the dangers of overmuch self-examination, the habit of morbid introspection which is sometimes the outcome of it. Everybody knows Carlyle's grim satire against Methodism, "with its eye forever turned on its own navel; asking itself, with torturing anxiety of hope and fear, 'Am I right? am I wrong? Shall I be saved? shall I not be damned?' What is this at bottom," he says, "but a new phasis of Egoism stretched out into the Infinite; not always the heavenlier for its infinitude?" An ugly picture, truly! though, so far as Methodism is concerned, rather a caricature than a portrait. But, granted that this is what self-examination may, and sometimes actually does, lead to, nevertheless it ought not and it need not. Because some have learned

the lesson amiss is not less but greater reason why we should seek to learn it aright. Every master in the deep things of the spirit of a man repeats unweariedly that great New Testament word, which is itself the sum of a hundred kindred words of Scripture: "Let a man examine himself." What bundles of inconsistency we are! Any business man will tell you that if he is to prosper he must keep a strict look-out, that, as he sometimes puts it, he must "know where he is;" and yet that self-same man, who can go over his accounts for a year, and tell you where every penny has come from and gone to, if you set him to reckon up matters in the world of the spirit, is utterly at a loss, unable even to make the simplest calculation.

Twelve months more you and I have sat at the loom of life weaving, weaving, weaving. A few hours, and the work of this year will be folded up and put by. Before it pass for ever from our hands, let us run our hand over it, and test it, and pass judgment upon it. Oh! pity on us, pity on us, if we never come to look at the web that we are weaving, till God take it into His own hands, to pass judgment on it Himself.

II

And we shall not go far, I think, in this so greatly needed work, before we shall feel that the Paisley weaver and the saintly mystic have both

described our own case in describing theirs; ours too is a sorely ravelled hasp.

It may be our thinking that has got ravelled. A year ago we thought we knew where we stood; we thought our beliefs had crystallized into their final shape; we could utter our "credo" with unfaltering lips. But one day a friend put a book into our hands, the work of a master mind; we were not prepared for it, and it went crashing through all our poor thinking like a bombshell; and to-night we hardly know where we are, or what we believe. Or, perhaps, it is some great sorrow that has wrought the mischief. We do not murmur when death shakes the ripened fruit from the bough; but when he plucks off the sweet young blossom, what can we say? Every little child's death seems like a blot on the divine goodness. How sorely trouble of that kind may ravel a man or a woman's thinking, any whose own experience has not taught them may learn from Mrs. Besant's painful *Autobiography*.

But worse even than this is the confusion wrought by sin in our life. It was only the other day that I heard a gray-headed man confess, bitterly and bluntly, that the devil had made "a sad mess" of him. Perhaps if we would be equally honest with ourselves, we should have to make a like confession. Do you tell me that the fault is not our own, that multitudes amongst us never had a chance; that, as the Paisley weaver put it, the hasp was ravelled ere it reached their

hands? Well, I do not want to fight against facts. A man cannot choose his own parents—which is only another way of saying that neither the outfit—physical and mental—with which he begins his life, nor its circumstances, are within his own choice. All these things which go so far towards determining the kind of life he is to live are settled for him; with this apparent result—I say "apparent," for this is a matter in which you and I can only see a very little way—that multitudes, in the terrible phrase of Charles Kingsley, are "damned from their birth." That is far too large a question for me to discuss now; and I am not so foolish as to think it can be disposed of in half a dozen oracular sentences. Perhaps I had better not have started it; but as it lay directly in our path we could hardly avoid meeting it. One or two simple things let me say—

(1) Where we do not know and have no right to judge, God's knowledge is perfect and His judgment accordingly. The world thrusts its prizes into the hands of the man who is first past the winning-post; God asks not only where did a man stop, but where did he start.

> "What's done we partly may compute,
> We know not what's resisted."

We do not, but God does. I may struggle with temptation ninety-nine times and conquer, and no man be the wiser; it is only the struggle that ends in defeat that the world hears of. But God

is witness of the whole hundred. Therefore, when you meet the man who has had "no chance," do not judge him, hold out a helping hand to him; then leave him and his ragged life-hasp with God: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

(2) Take heed that you ravel no other man's hasp. I wish I could whisper that word in the ears of some of you every day this week. You do not need me to tell you how difficult our social customs make it for many men to keep their feet at this festive season of the year; and how easily what is meant as kindness may become a stone of stumbling and rock of offence. I am delighted to see that one of our city Temperance Societies is endeavouring at this moment, by the issue of a vigorously-worded appeal, to create something like a public conscience on the question of "treating." No wiser or more timely step could possibly have been taken. Only this last week I talked with a working man, whose business is the delivery of coals from house to house; for years the drink has been a snare to him, and he told me how he dreaded the coming of the days that would bring with their every hour the offer of what to him was death. Do not think I am advocating stinginess or closefistedness; our temperance friends must take care to be above that suspicion; to check the season's openheartedness would be hardly less than a public misfortune. Only let our gifts be such that they will bless both him that gives and

him that takes; and remember the whisky-bottle does neither.

(3) But what I want above all to emphasize is this, that whatever may be the truth about others, so far as most of us are concerned, conscience tells us plainly enough, if only we will listen to it, that the responsibility for our ravelled hasp is our own.

With some of us it is the morning of our days that is the perilous time. "I must tell you," writes Rutherford to Earlston the younger, "that there is not such a glassy, icy, and slippery piece of way betwixt you and heaven as youth; and I have experiences to say with me here, and to seal what I assert. The old ashes of the sins of my youth are new fire of sorrow to me. I have seen the devil, as it were, dead and buried, and yet rise again, and be a worse devil than ever he was; therefore, my brother, beware of a green young devil that hath never been buried." God help us who are young, that we may take heed to ourselves, and that, as Rutherford says, we may have sanctified thoughts, thoughts made conscience of, and called in and kept in awe! So shall the years bring to us not a weary load of bitter memories and vain regrets, but the peace and calm of the man who has triumphed over self.

And some of us there are, who—however it may be with us at other times—always get our hasp ravelled and our web broken at this Christmas and New Year time. To multitudes in our city this week will be a veritable Vanity Fair.

It lies there in the path; they cannot help themselves; like Christian and Faithful they must needs pass through it. But, oh! the peril of it, the peril of it! I shall carry some of you on my heart all through this week, and pray that God will bring you safely through it. And do you look to yourselves, and set a watch upon yourselves, "that ye enter not into temptation"; or you may sit down at the loom for your New Year's weaving with a hasp ravelled and torn at its very beginning.

And not the young only, but all of us—and not at Christmas and the New Year only, but always—need to keep a sleepless vigil. For the cause of the mischief lies not either in age or in circumstances: it is rooted deep in the evil of our own hearts. A man's worst enemies are not those he meets from without, but those he carries about with him within. "No hell in any remote place," says William Law, "no devil that is separate from you, no darkness or pain that is not within you, no antichrist either at Rome or England, no furious beast, no fiery dragon, without or apart from you, can do you any hurt. It is your own hell, your own devil, your own beast, your own antichrist, your own dragon, that lives in your heart's blood, that alone can hurt you."

III

Here, then, we are on this last Sunday evening

of the dying year, young and old alike,—some have strayed in this way, and some in that,—all of us with our ravelled hasps; what shall we do? To begin with, let us be thankful that at least we are enough concerned about ourselves to ask that question. "What shall we do?" I suppose the first thing we all try is to put matters right ourselves. A very natural thing; but did man ever put his hand to such a heart-breaking bit of work as that? With aching fingers and tear-dimmed eyes we have bent over it and toiled at it; but, alas! things only grow worse: they were ravelled past our mending. Some of us can remember how, when we were bairns, we tangled our mother's knitting; and how, when we tried to right it, and to gather up the lost threads, we only went from bad to worse, till at last there was no way out of it, but just to put it all back into her hands for her cleverer fingers to deal with.

"Twenty times a day," says Rutherford, "I ravel my heaven." But twenty times a day, he tells us, does he come with his ill-ravelled work to Christ to cumber Him to right it, and to seek again the right end of the thread. "God be thanked," he cries, "for many spilled salvations and many ill-ravelled hasps hath Christ mended since first He entered Tutor to lost mankind." And to this same gracious Christ let us make haste to come that He may do for us what so often He did for His prisoner in Aberdeen. Oh! brethren, is it not time to be doing something,

time to be doing this very thing? Our days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; why then do we delay?

The child who ravelled his hasp, says Dr. Whyte, was sent supperless to bed, the weaver was dismissed or fined in half his wages. Penalties do not always follow with that automatic precision in the spiritual world. Yet is it not a fact that this year God has called to some of us, sometimes with sharp blows and solemn warnings? Shall we not give heed ere the year be wholly gone?

. . . . . .

There is only one other thing I want to say. Again and again as I sat in my study preparing the notes for this address, Mr. Barrie's beautiful story, *A Window in Thrums*, came back to my mind. Perhaps there was a natural association between my subject and the little weaving town of which he writes; but however it was, I could not put it out of my thoughts. I thought of Hendry at his loom, and Jess at her window that watched the brae, and Jamie the son in London and his sorely ravelled hasp. And then I thought of the many like him, whom I had come to know in our own city, who had left behind them somewhere hearts as loving and faithful as Jess's, and who had lived to hurt and to wound, and perhaps to break them, even as Jamie did hers. And then I prayed that if one such there should be listening to me to-night, the voice of the old and dying year might call him home again to love and God!

THE MISSIONARY MOTIVE

XIII

THE MISSIONARY MOTIVE[1]

YOU will, I hope, acquit me of any straining after eccentricity, or any affectation of singularity, if I confess at the outset, that, though I intend to preach a missionary sermon, I have no verse to announce by way of text.

In many ways, but especially, perhaps, through changes in our theology, the missionary motive has of recent years, in many minds, suffered heavy loss. My aim to-night is the reinforcement of that motive; and though I do not begin, as is usual, with a text of Scripture, my appeal all through—need I say it?—will be to Christ and to the Word of God.

Of the changes in our theology, and particularly in our eschatology—for it is with these last that we are most concerned just now—there can be no doubt. All Christian Churches have ceased

[1] Preached on behalf of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, in Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London, on Wednesday, 29th April 1896.

to hold, at least as a living, operative faith, the gloomy creed once so common as to the future of the heathen who died without the knowledge of Christ. Equally impossible is it, I think, to doubt that the gradual relaxation in our theology is, in many cases at least, the explanation of that unhappy waning of missionary enthusiasm we all so much deplore. We still believe in missions, but we no longer feel their imperative urgency, because no longer do we fear the dread, imminent peril of those to whom our missionaries go.

We have long admitted this, I believe, to ourselves, and to one another—in private. But as yet little has been said about it in public. The subject is a thorny and difficult one, and, except on the rarest occasions, missionary preachers and speakers have been wont to let it severely alone. But difficult as the task may be, it will, I think, be well for us to-night—and especially for the young men to whom I am more directly to address myself—if, beginning with a frank recognition of the facts, we attempt some re-statement of the claims of Foreign Missions in the light of modern truth.

I

First, then, as to the facts: (1) It will not, I think, be disputed that one of the strongest incentives to missionary enterprise in the past has been the belief that the heathen who died in their sins

ignorant of Christ were for ever lost. Mr. Edward White, in his *Life in Christ*, says, "In the opinion of Dr. Carey, and those who first went with him to India, . . . all the unregenerate of all ages were unsaved, and the unsaved of India, as of all lands, were destined to be delivered over, as Dr. Carey says in one of his letters, to 'endless misery.' To endless misery had departed all the unregenerate inhabitants of Asia during the ages of darkness preceding the advent of Dr. Carey to India. To endless misery were going all the millions who rejected his message, or refused to abandon their ancestral creeds. This is still the foundation of our missionary theology. This is still what may be called the State creed of the missionary societies, Roman and Protestant. No one is considered at liberty to deny it in a missionary speech or sermon. It is the basis of the Propaganda. It is the platform creed of Exeter Hall. The students at the missionary colleges are supposed to believe it. The missionaries abroad are supposed to believe it. No one who openly assailed it would be permitted to plead the cause of missions before the British or American people."

It is only fair to Mr. White to remember that these words were written twenty years ago; and probably, if he were to re-write his book to-day, he would think it necessary to make some considerable revisions in the chapter from which I have quoted. Even as an estimate of the missionary theology of a generation ago we might have to

insist on a little preliminary docking of rhetorical flourishes before we could accept it as a correct and final judgment. But if we take it as generally descriptive of the state of belief on this subject up to within comparatively recent years, it is probably not far wide of the mark. It would be a very easy matter to give definite illustrations—our own experience, doubtless, will supply us with several—but perhaps it will be sufficient to quote the words of the late Dr. Dale: "There was a time," he said in a speech delivered in Exeter Hall, in May 1881, "when the great stress of the argument on behalf of Christian missions was rested on the dark and appalling destiny which was supposed to menace, without discrimination, the whole of the heathen world; it was believed by many of our fathers that these millions were drifting, generation after generation, without a solitary exception, to 'adamantine chains and penal fires.'" Speaking as a Methodist, I doubt very much if John Wesley would have subscribed to a creed so gloomy; certainly Cowper, one of the earliest poets of the Evangelical faith, rejected it with indignation; but that it was the creed of the average follower of John Wesley fifty years ago I have little doubt. Our people sang, and felt it as they sang—

> "The heathen perish day by day,
> Thousands on thousands pass away!
> O Christians to their rescue fly;
> Preach Jesus to them ere they die."

One of my earliest attempts at public speaking was from the platform of a missionary meeting in a Cornish village. I was a budding local preacher, not then out of my teens. On the platform with me was my venerable superintendent and Chairman of the District. Of course I had to speak first, and I made out as good a case as I could for Foreign Missions, saying, among other things, something to the effect that, even though we could not believe what men once believed concerning the future of the heathen, motives, many and sufficient, still remained to us. When I sat down my old friend and counsellor rose. He referred to what I had said, and then, in his most solemn and impressive tones, he declared that he, for one, did hold that ancient faith, and moreover, that if it were not so—if the heathen were not perishing day by day—for his part, he did not see that it was "worth while" sending our missionaries to tell them of Christ. The words struck a chill of horror into my young heart, but they were spoken in all sincerity, and they expressed, I do not doubt, what multitudes once felt to be the all-compelling motive to missionary activity.

(2) To-day—and this is the second fact I ask you to recognize—that belief is dead. We may still sing Montgomery's hymn in Exeter Hall and at our missionary meetings; but the moment we begin to think about what we are singing, our hearts are in silent rebellion. Nor is this simply a change in the message of the pulpit; it is

perhaps even more a change in the mood of the pew. You *might* find a preacher to preach the old doctrine; you would have difficulty in finding an audience to respond to it. As the *Methodist Recorder* stated in a leading article only a few days ago: "We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that neither in the pulpit nor in the pew is there the same belief in hell which was one of the most awful and tremendous incentives to earnestness that Methodism had in the days long gone by. If a minister who *does* know the 'terrors of the Lord' stands up in the street and cries aloud, 'Flee from the wrath to come,' whatever may be the precise colour of his own eschatology, the crowd in front of him does not believe in the damnation of hell as did the crowd looking up into John Wesley's face at Kingswood or Moorfields. The old belief in hell—or, to put it more accurately, the hell of the old belief—has gone. It may be that we have a truer and, all things considered, a more awful creed concerning sin and its future punishment, but it is not a belief which at present appeals to the people—to their imagination, to their conscience—as did the belief of the olden times." It is worthy of note, too, that the change has not come about through controversy. The old belief has not so much been argued down as it has been killed off by the spirit and temper of the age in which we live. It has been "relegated," to quote the words of Mr. Lecky, "to the dim twilight land that surrounds every living

faith; the land not of death, but of the shadow of death; the land of the unrealized and the inoperative."

II

These, then, are some of the facts which, it appears to me, call for frank recognition on the part of the Christian Church. In stating them—not, I trust, without some rough approximation to accuracy—I have endeavoured to avoid any expression of merely individual opinion; but, before I turn from the past to the present, there is one further observation I wish to make. It is usually assumed, and rightly assumed, that for those who held the old faith concerning the future of the heathen, no more tremendous motive to missionary activity was possible. I venture to think, though it may seem to be raising a nice point in psychology, that if those who held that old belief had fully realized it—if when they said, as they did sometimes say, "that at every ticking of the clock in every four-and-twenty hours, from month to month and year to year, God sends a heathen straight to never-ending misery"—if, I say, when they said these things they had ever taken what Kinglake somewhere calls the great step from *knowing* to *imagining*, it would have been to them not so much a quickening, energizing motive, as rather a crushing, paralyzing responsibility. If (I borrow an illustration of Dr. New-

man Smyth's) I were conducting an evangelistic service here to-night, and it were given me to declare, "All who do not come to Jesus before the clock shall finish striking nine shall have no further day of grace," some might think that I had the mightiest motive conceivable to plead and to pray. For my part, I think such a responsibility would leave me dumbly impotent, for when the strength of a motive passes a certain point it ceases to be a stimulus and becomes instead a paralyzing drag. Never, in my least kindly hours, have I questioned the sincerity of those who believed that the heathen have gone in their countless millions to endless misery; but, surely, the very abundance of their works itself bears witness that they knew not what they said. The day that Christians began to "imagine," the dogma was doomed; and now, as we have already seen, as a motive to missionary zeal it has practically ceased to exist.

The old motive is gone, and gone beyond all hope of recall. Has not the time come when we should openly admit it, and when we should boldly declare, that though the fashion of our theological thought has changed, and may change again, the missionary obligation abides, and can never pass till Christ shall have put all enemies under His feet? Nor need we fear the result; I do not believe that our kindlier faith will be less quick to kindle the fires of missionary ardour, or that we who hold it will not be as hot and eager to pro-

claim the Gospel of Christ to the multitudes of India and China as our fathers were.

Turn with me for a moment to the Acts of the Apostles; and I ask you to mark this fact —a fact surely not without significance in this connection—that from the first chapter of that book to the last, there is not one word concerning the future of the unsaved. Remember what is the character of this book. It is our one record of the first and greatest outburst of missionary activity in the history of the Christian Church. Its few and narrow pages are crowded with the triumphs of the first preachers of the Gospel. The narrative pants in its eager haste to keep up with the busy feet of the great missionary of the Gentiles. Scarce thirty years had passed from the giving of the Great Commission before, in Jerusalem, in Judæa, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth, the word of this salvation had been preached. But, if you take the book which tells all this, and from it alone try to reconstruct the Christian creed, you will need to leave out the doctrine of future retribution, for on that solemn theme the book from end to end is silent. A very distinguished New Testament scholar, to whom all the Churches of Christ, and our own in particular, are under a lasting debt of gratitude, recently made, in the pages of one of our theological magazines, a detailed examination of the teaching of the whole of the New Testament on this subject. The Gospels, the

Epistles, the Book of Revelation, were all in turn submitted to a searching analysis, and the results carefully set forth; but when the writer came to the Acts of the Apostles he dismissed it with a couple of lines, for it had nothing to tell. Mark, I am not saying this in order to cast any doubt upon the doctrine of eternal punishment itself. That I may not be misunderstood, let me say at once that I do not know how any man, honestly reading his New Testament, can evade Dean Church's conclusion when he says: "We may put aside the New Testament altogether; but if we profess to be guided by it, is there anything but a 'certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation' for obstinate, impenitent, unforgiven sin, sin without excuse and without change?" All this I do most firmly believe; but what I beg you to observe is this, that so unnecessary is it to associate *any* theory of the future of the unsaved with missionary enthusiasm of the loftiest and purest character, that in this book, glowing as it is throughout with missionary ardour, there is yet not one word of which the dogmatic theologian, arguing the question of future punishment, can lay hold. Again I say, I am not throwing, even by implication, any discredit upon that doctrine itself: what I do desire to make plain is that there are motives outside and beyond this dark and difficult subject which, if we will yield ourselves to them, are mighty enough to carry us to the highest levels of service and of sacrifice, and

to make us not unworthy followers of Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Let us glance at one or two of these for a moment now.

III

I speak to Christians; for, he who does not acknowledge the claims of Christ is not likely to acknowledge the claims of Christian missions. I speak to Christians; and, therefore, I have nothing to do with secondary motives. You will hear nothing to-night about the markets which missionaries have opened up for your cotton stuffs and the like, nothing about the straight paths which they have made for the feet of the diplomatist or the empire-builder. For my part I shall not be sorry when we have dropped that method of appeal altogether. Salvation cometh not either by merchants or by politicians, but by men that believe in Christ. It may be perfectly true that missions have proved a good business investment for our country, and that a vigorous missionary policy is the very best foreign policy; but that is a matter we had better leave to the merchants and politicians themselves; the Church only weakens her appeal when she mingles the clay with the gold after that fashion. Brethren, if we would march victoriously, we must march to the music of the highest motives. What are they?

(1) Turn again for a moment to the Acts of the Apostles. When Jesus and His disciples

were come together, so we read in the first chapter, they asked of Him, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?" Mark well the answer: "*It is not for you to know*—it is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority." But when He has shut to that door, and double-locked and bolted it, "This way!" He says: "Ye shall receive power . . . and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." "And when He had said these things, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight," and prying inquisitiveness never got its answer.

I think there be some amongst us to-day who have never done asking questions. They have drawn up a little Shorter Catechism of their own, and the answer to its first question runs thus: "The chief end of man is to speculate concerning the Unknown and to argue about it for ever." "Lord, what wilt Thou do at the last great day with them that died having never heard Thy name? —wilt Thou——" "*It is not for you to know.* But ye shall be My witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Then again the cloud receives Him out of our sight. On the one hand is a problem bewildering, vast, mysterious, tiny pin-points of light dotting here and there the great darkness; on the other hand is an obligation, perpetual, sacred, clear as obligation can ever be, lying there in the light, wholly beyond even the

edge of the shadow of that dark mystery. Take heed, my brother, lest, in thy feverish eagerness to know the thing that is hidden, thou forget to do the thing that is revealed.

(2) And who is He that lays this obligation upon men? Let us turn to another Scripture. It was the Sabbath day, and a man whom Jesus had healed was carrying his bed in the streets of Jerusalem. "It is the Sabbath," said the Jews, "and it is not lawful for thee to take up thy bed." Mark the healed man's answer. "He that made me whole," replied he, "the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk." I like that man's logic passing well. "He that cured me, shall He not command me? He that gave me power, shall He not also direct the power He gave? He that made me whole, He said unto me—what more do you want?"

"He that made me whole"—is that your name for Christ? Is that what He is to you—is it? Then He has rights in you, the strongest of all rights—the rights of love. Herein is His *claim* upon you. And here, too, is your answer to them that ask, "Why do ye this thing?"—the missionary's answer to a world that smiles at what it deems his foolish knight-errantry: "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Go—go ye into the uttermost parts of the earth, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Refuse to come down from that high ground. Do not stoop to answer every idle interrogation; refer the questioner to

Christ: "He that made me whole, He said unto me." A Christian man must not expect always to be able to justify himself to everybody; he must expect to be misunderstood. But if he hold Christ's warrant in his hand, what matters it? "He that made me whole, He said unto me"—ye whom He never healed, how should ye know? Behold, ye speak an idle thing; He bids me; that is enough.

(3) And, further, let us remember that it is only through them who do so recognize the claims of Christ that His supreme purposes of grace towards men can be fulfilled. Once more I turn to the Acts of the Apostles. "The former treatise I made, O Theophilus," so runs its opening verse, "concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was received up." The writer, of course, is Luke; the "former treatise" to which he refers is the Gospel which bears his name; and the contents of that Gospel he summarizes by saying that it is a record of "all that Jesus began to do and to teach." "Of all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach"—mark that word "began." I am no pedlar in the small wares of exegetical ingenuity, and I know it is quite possible to explain the Evangelist's use of the word as a mere verbal peculiarity, empty of any special significance. But it is possible—and if necessary I might shelter myself behind more than one great name—to see in it a deeper meaning. Luke's Gospel is a record of "what Jesus

began to do and to teach"; what is the inference? That this book, which is a kind of sequel to the Gospel, is a record of what Jesus *continued* to do and to teach, and that instead of calling it "The Acts of the Apostles," we ought rather to speak of it as "The Acts of Jesus" through the Apostles. But if that is so, more follows. If Jesus continued to do and to teach through the Apostles, His doing and teaching did not cease when the historian Luke laid down his pen. Christ's work is still incomplete, and He is still completing it through the work of His servants; it is ours to finish His unfinished tasks; we are to be the agents of His continued activity amongst men.

That is what I want us to grasp. Christ is still active; He is still "doing and teaching"; but His activity is conditioned by the agents through whom He works. He works, not by prodigies that dazzle and stun, but by men and women. "The worst of it is God never seems to do anything, Froude," Carlyle said to his friend and biographer one day. Yes, but what kind of "doing" are we looking for? God does not save men by some marvellous forth-flashing of His divine glory in the heavens; He saves men by saved men. When He feeds the hungry it is not by manna rained from heaven, but by human hands made "quicker unto good" through love for Him. By men, men whom He has redeemed, does He sweeten the bitter waters of life; and it is by men that at last He will draw the world

unto Himself. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." But now listen: "How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed; and how shall they believe in Him Whom they have not heard; and how shall they hear *without a preacher?*" Everything hangs at last on the human agent. But neither does Paul stop there—"and how shall they preach, *except they be sent?*" And after that there is not one of us who can slip his neck out of the collar of responsibility. "If God wants to save Africa, cannot He do it without you throwing your life away?" said a lady to Alexander Mackay, when he was setting out for Uganda. No! He cannot; at least, He does not, and that is all we have to do with. "Prayer moves the hand that moves the world"; yes, but as Mackay himself once said, the fingers of that hand are earnest men and women. We are "God's fellow-workers;" and if He says to us, "Apart from Me ye can do nothing," may we not also humbly say to Him, for it is He Himself who has taught us to say it, "Yea, Lord, and, apart from us, Thou also canst do nothing"?

(4) And if we fail Him—what? One last passage of His Word shall be my answer: "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." When you read that, how do you interpret it? "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord that shall fall upon them that continue in impenitence, and that harden their hearts against His word, we persuade men." So

I thought; and I will not say you are wrong. But when I say that verse over to myself I put another interpretation on it: "Knowing the terror of the Lord that shall fall upon *me* if, having the light, I hide it, and, knowing the truth, I do not speak it; therefore, Lord Jesus, teach me that, with Thy words, spoken in Thy tones, I may persuade men."

When Paul thinks about the judgment-seat of Christ it is not to remind himself that all men will one day stand there, and to wonder what shall befall them, but to remember that he himself will be there, and to pray that at the last he may be found faithful. And if we ask him, "What will God do with the heathen that die in the darkness?" I think he will bid us rather ask each man himself this question, "What will God do with *me* if, when my lamp is lit, I leave my brother man to wander friendless in the night?"

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

XIV

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A BIBLE READING

"And in the house the disciples asked Him again of this matter. And He saith unto them . . ."—MARK X. 10, 11.

BUT as it is not of "this matter" that I want at this moment to speak to you, we may break off the sentence there. I want you to mark the method of the Teacher with His disciples. "They asked Him again of this matter. And He saith unto them . . ." Question and answer—have you noticed how full the Gospels are of these? It was in this way—they asking, He answering—that He taught them. Let us listen to some of these questions and answers. True, we can catch but little snatches of the long dialogue that for three years went on between the Master and the disciples; nevertheless, if God grant us the hearing ear and the understanding heart, we may learn many things that Jesus said to the twelve for their instruction, and that He still says to us for ours.

An address on lines such as these must of necessity be somewhat fragmentary, and will take the form of a Bible reading rather than a sermon; yet if from the tiny basket full of fragments no man get a full meal, at least each man may get a little. When first I began to preach, one who knew how told me that in every sermon there should be a unity—a unity that should reveal itself in every word from first to last. I believe the advice was good, and usually I have tried to follow it. But the best rule is a bad one if you never break it; and for once this rule shall be honoured in the breach rather than the observance. May one plead the authority of the great Preacher himself?[1] "When great multitudes came to Him, He spake"—what? "many things." "Many things"—not a set discourse, one, perfect, complete, proceeding point by point along a carefully defined track, but "many things." He was there to feed the hungry, and there must be something for everybody; and since many came unto Him, He set many things before them. For the deep, wise thinker there was a deep, wise saying that will keep him busy for many a day to come; for the little child—ay, and for the grown-up child too—who loves to think in pictures, the homely parable and the lovely story; for the tired and worn, words soft and low, gentle as a mother's crooning to her

[1] In what immediately follows I am indebted, I believe, to a sermon of Dr. Parker's.

babe; for the bad man, exulting in his badness, words sharp and terrible, piercing as a javelin thrust. "He spake many things." God grant that out of the "many things" of His Word, each may find something for himself this day!

Now let us turn to some of the disciples' questions.

I

I note, in the first place, that to some of their questions Christ gave no answer. "Lord," they said unto Him, when He had gathered them together for the last time at the close of the great forty days, "dost thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?" "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority." Again, in the upper room at Jerusalem, when Jesus had spoken of His mysterious going away, Peter asked Him, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" "Whither I go," answered Jesus, "thou canst not follow Me now: but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." Peter saith unto Him, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee even now? I will lay down my life for Thee." "Wilt thou lay down thy life for Me?" said Jesus, taking the words from off his lips: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied Me thrice." And Peter's question remained without its answer.

The disciples are still questioning the Master, and to many of their questions He is still saying, "It is not for you to know." How this habit of intellectual inquisitiveness has laid hold of us to-day! This is the Bypath Meadow wherein we love to wander. We write books that start as many questions as a catechism; and the story of the lives of some amongst us can be told by a sufficiently big note of interrogation.

It is useless to murmur because things are so. In part we cannot help ourselves; we are so made that we must ask questions, even though as we ask them we know no answer can be given. Nor should we forget that it is from this very restlessness that the largest and richest results have sometimes sprung. But religion has, and always has had, its questions to which no searching can find out the answer. There is a very interesting letter in Principal Shairp's *Life*, in which, writing to a correspondent, he says:—"There are many difficulties, critical, historical, metaphysical, connected with religion which you cannot answer now—which you probably will never be able to answer. *Make up your mind to this at once.*" But it is exactly that that some of us find it so difficult to do. I remember when I was a student at college, beginning for the first time to think about these things, there were one or two subjects, and one in particular, about which I felt that unless my doubts in regard to them could somehow be cleared up, I had better

give up all idea of preaching and go back to my teaching. My doubts are not all gone yet; but I have come to see that there are some things, as Jesus told His disciples, that are not for me to know; so perhaps I had better go on with my preaching after all.

And is it any wonder if Christ has not yet told us all things? "To comprehend God," said Sir Wm. Hamilton, our great Scottish metaphysician, "is to be God." Shall I murmur because my little hand cannot span the great mountain? because the tiny cup I call my intellect cannot hold the ocean?

But if much is hidden, much, thank God—enough—is revealed. You cannot make a perfect chart of God's truth. Try, if you will; and you will get something like one of the old maps of Africa that we used to see—a wavering coast-line, here and there an uncertain river course, the tail end of a mountain range, and so on; and all through the interior great blanks unexplored and unknown. But though that be so, the great highways of human duty run plain and clear. Not yet on the distant mountain-tops have the mists lifted; perhaps to these eyes they never will lift. But here, in the valley where God calls me to walk, there is light enough, and I need never miss my way. "There are many difficulties," says Principal Shairp in the letter I have just quoted; but he goes on, "There can be no doubt at all about goodness—about the Christian standard of life and temper, which rises before us

in the New Testament. There is no speculative difficulty at all here — none but the great practical one of realizing it." "Follow Me," says Jesus—there runs the great highway; take heed that you do not wander from it, and when night falls be lost in the dark.

II

"Then came Peter and said to Him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" You may be quite sure Jesus will not let that question pass unanswered. Listen to it: "*How oft* shall I forgive?" How the word grates on one's ear? What has love to do with arithmetic? "Until seven times?"—as if love stopped to count its past injuries before it forgave again! There is another question of Peter's pitched in the same false key: "Lo, we have left all and followed Thee; what then shall we have?"—like a man on the other side of your shop-counter, who has put down his money, and stands waiting till you give him its exact equivalent. Peter is back at his arithmetic again.

And there are multitudes to whom in the same way religion seems to resolve itself into a little problem in mathematics. "Master," said one, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"—"having done what, shall I inherit eternal life?" Religion to this man is simply a question of doing—so

many alms *plus* so many prayers *plus* so many ceremonies, etc.—"eternal life" is the reward that by and by he is to get for his doing; and the only question that troubles him is an arithmetical one—he is not quite sure how much ought to be done; and so he will ask this new Teacher: "Master, what sayest *Thou?* having done what shall I inherit eternal life?" A certain man went up into the temple to pray. His prayer is a little sum in addition; its several items his own excellences; its total the price at which he will purchase the favour of God. And are there not many of us still whose religion, if we get to the bottom of it, is really a bit of conscious or unconscious bargaining with God? We read our Bible, we say our prayers, we give our tithes—do we?—we pay our weekly toll of worship in God's house: that is our side of the bargain. And God sees to it, in some way or other, that it shall be well with us, both in the life that now is and in that which is to come.

What does Christ say of this pitiable, arithmetical religion? He will have none of it: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Give, work, love all thou canst—

> "High Heaven rejects the lore
> Of nicely-calculated less or more."

He who thinks that forgiveness must go back over all the bad past, before it will bow its head and be itself, does not know what forgiveness

means. Love never asks "How oft?" Love never stops to bargain. Love never says, "Come half the way, and I will come the other half." No; "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" — that is the mighty speech of love. And as God has dealt with us, so He bids us deal the one with the other. "He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." When our hearts are hardening into the spirit of unforgivingness, and when like Peter, we are tempted to ask, "How oft shall I forgive?" then, as Samuel Rutherford wrote to Marion M'Naught, "Let us remember what has been forgiven us."

III

"Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast it out?" That, also, is a question that is certain of its answer. Jesus will never greet an honest confession of failure with silence. You remember the circumstances. Jesus with three of His disciples was on the Mount of Transfiguration. In His absence the father of a poor demoniac boy brought his suffering child to the other disciples that they should heal him; but they could not. Now they are anxious to know the cause of their failure: "Why could not we cast it out?" There are some who never succeed, because they will never

admit that they have failed. Yet the confession of failure to-day may be the first step towards success to-morrow.

"Why could not we cast it out?"—if only the Christian Church would more often take that humble and humbling inquiry into her lips! Why is missionary enthusiasm on the wane? Why are the converts from heathenism so few? Why are so many of our home churches more than half empty? Why—as the question is often nowadays put — why do not working men go to church? But we had rather not face the questions. We prefer to listen to amiable speeches and flattering reports, to be patted on the back, and to be told what a great people we are, and, generally, to live in a fool's paradise. "See!" cries some one, "see!" and he walks round and round the little molehill of things done. Now, who will show us the great mountain of things undone, unattempted even? Two or three years ago I ventured to raise in our city the question of non-churchgoing among working men. "Working men not go to church?" said one; "why, my congregation are all working people — look at them." "Working men not go to church?" said another; "but look at my officials; count them— one, two, three — they are all working men." Professional dunderheads! It is easy enough— all too easy, alas! — to count the working men who are inside the Church; now begin to count them that are outside, and we shall not hear of

these again for a while. But we will do anything, some of us, rather than admit that we have failed.

I come a step nearer home. Is not the same true of our own personal failures? We do not conquer because we will not confess. I draw a bow at a venture. Yesterday you lied, you cheated a brother-man, you let some angry passion leap up within you and master you. And now to-day you will not admit it; you will not admit it to yourself, you will not admit it to the man you wronged, and therefore, of course, you cannot admit it to God. You joined with the preacher a moment ago, when he prayed "Forgive us our trespasses;" but, I think, God never hears that prayer. So long as we are content to slur over our "trespass" in a vague prayer for the forgiveness of our "trespasses," we are but wasting words. We must put our finger upon the foul, black thing in our life, and name it before God: "*This* trespass, *this* trespass, O Lord, do Thou forgive and put far from me;" then He will bow the heavens and come down. But until, like the disciples, we confess our failures, until we stand over them and name them by their right names, neither peace nor victory can be ours.

IV

"Simon Peter saith unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" The disciple's question

has in it an echo of the same wonder that filled the heart of John when, in after years, he looked back upon that memorable scene in the upper room. What John saw was this: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God,"—*He*, conscious of all this,—"riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments; and took a towel and girded Himself, and began to wash the disciples' feet." This was what Peter could not understand. That Jesus should be called and should call Himself a King, that He should work great and mighty miracles, that wherever He went the multitudes should throng Him—that were no wonder. But that One so great should humble Himself to stoop so low—how could that be! "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?"

Do we understand it even yet? "Ye know," said Jesus, "that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them"; and so is it still. But that is not the true greatness: "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister, and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant." There is no other path to greatness but the path of lowly service. You know the motto round the Prince of Wales' feathers, *Ich dien*—I serve; and I tell you that on all God's earth there is no true princedom that is not built on service. "The Son of Man" Himself "came

not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." "I am among you," He said, "as he that serveth."

What was that I heard you say? You knew some one who lived in his great country-house, who could drive twenty miles in a straight line over his own land, and he—what was it?—*kept so many servants.* Well, I say nothing against that. But do you know, my friend, your place in God's aristocracy depends not on the number who serve you, but on the number whom you serve? Now, where do we stand? Ah! if we saw men with God's eyes, I think, we should often stand hat in hand before many a man who never yet filled up an income-tax paper. In His sight there are no crowned ones save those who are among us as they that serve.

V

One moment longer let us linger with the Master and His disciples in that upper room. "One of you," He said unto them as they sat with Him at the passover meal, "one of you shall betray Me"; and we can almost hear the silence that falls upon the little company. Then one by one they begin to say unto Him, "Lord, is it I? is it I?" A strange question, surely, we think. We do not wonder that Judas should ask it—we do not wonder at anything he may do—but why should Peter, and John, and James thus doubt

themselves? What right has self-distrust like this on lips like theirs?

But if we think a moment longer perhaps we shall begin to understand it. Do we not know the awful possibilities of evil that lie coiled up and sleeping within the hearts of even the best of us? Do we not know what it is to come near to utter shipwreck? to be walking as on some razor edge of peril, death yawning on either side of us? Ah, yes! I think I know what Peter and John and the rest of them meant. I have had glimpses of my own heart which have sometimes made me tremble; and when I hear of this man or that who has fallen from righteousness, who am I that I should condemn him?—there is but a little space betwixt him and me; and I will rather take heed to myself lest I also be tempted. "Lord, is it I? is it I?" Oh! men and women, have we not had experiences enough to knock all the pride and all the self-confidence out of us for ever? "As for me," said the psalmist, "my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped." Have you never been there? Do you not know that awful sense of being all but gone? One moment more and the tide had swept us off our feet; one step farther and we had been over the precipice; but somehow—we do not know how, it is all a great mystery of divine grace—we were saved; and henceforth we carry with us, plucked from the heart of that great experience, a new sense of our own peril; we understand

now what the disciples meant when they asked, "Lord, is it I? is it I?"

Fix your eye upon yourself. Again and again the enemy takes us by surprise and overwhelms us with disaster because we do not know ourselves. Here and now let us take the candle of the Lord in our hand, and ourselves go down into the cavernous depths of our hearts, and search out all their dark places, that we may see and know ourselves as God sees and knows us. And yet I would not have my last word to be of self. You cannot think too often or too humbly of yourself, but you may think too exclusively. Therefore when you enter into that secret conference between your own heart and yourself, take Christ with you; and sure as you are of your own weakness and sin, be even more sure of His power to save you. "Howbeit I am a wretched captive of sin," cries Rutherford, "yet my Lord can hew heaven out of worse timber than I am." Yes, "He is able to save unto the uttermost"; and there is no life however bad that does not lie inside the boundless rim of God's great uttermost.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF UNBELIEF

XV

THE DIFFICULTIES OF UNBELIEF

THERE was published some few years ago a series of little books entitled *Helps to Belief*. They deal with such subjects as Prayer, the Atonement, the Divinity of our Lord, and so on, and they are described by the publishers as a series of "Helpful manuals on the religious difficulties of the day." They are for the most part well written by competent hands, and to those who feel the difficulties of which they treat, likely to be of considerable service.

Did it ever occur to any one, I wonder, to publish a series of *Helps to Unbelief?* A distinguished American divine (Dr. Newman Smyth) has printed a sermon with this title, *The Difficulty of not Believing*. That is worth thinking about. Men talk sometimes as if the only persons troubled with intellectual difficulties to-day are those who still continue to believe in Jesus Christ. I grant that the believer has his difficulties, though I

think they are often absurdly exaggerated; I would rather say with Robert Browning,

> "The acknowledgment of God in Christ,
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it."

But what is so constantly overlooked is that if belief has its difficulties so also has unbelief. The choice does not lie between a thorny, tangled thicket on the one hand and a level greensward on the other. You may give up your religious faith and flatter yourself that henceforth you will carry no more burdens heavy and grievous to be borne; but unless, at the same time, you are to renounce your intellect as well, you will find that instead of having got rid of your load you have only exchanged it for another and heavier. That is what I want in this address to make plain. My subject is the "Difficulties of Unbelief."

Obviously the subject is a very wide one, and I shall not attempt to touch it at more than one point. What are we to believe about Jesus Christ? The alternatives have been stated with such admirable precision and force by Dr. Dods, that I venture to read his words to you. "What is Christ?" he asks; "what is the truth about Him; how is He to be accounted for; and what lies at the root of His influence? Is He a supernatural interpolation in the history of our race, or is He the natural product of antecedent persons and conditions? Did He begin to be when born

in Judæa, or did He come from a previous existence? Is He human, precisely as other men are human, or has He a unique relationship to the Father and to the Unseen? Is Christ merely the best of men, or is He the same Who was with God, and was God, and by Whom God made the world?"

The answer of the Christian Church to these questions is known to all: it is, it always has been, unhesitating and unmistakable. I do not affirm that answer to be free from difficulties, though to discuss those difficulties is not within our present province, but I ask you to mark some of the problems that unbelief is compelled to take in hand when it rejects that answer. The modern unbeliever declares, to adopt the language of Dr. Dods, that Christ is the natural product of antecedent persons and conditions, that He began to be when born in Judæa, and that though beyond doubt the best of men, He is nevertheless human, precisely as other men are human. Singularly enough, this declaration has substantially just been made by a minister of the Church of Scotland in a book, the main conclusions of which appear wholly indistinguishable from Unitarianism.[1] I cannot enter into a dis-

[1] I refer, of course, to the Rev. Alexander Robinson, B.D., of Kilmun, whose volume, *The Saviour in the Newer Light*, was exciting considerable attention in Scotland at the time when this address was delivered. It is only fair to add that Mr. Robinson's teaching has been utterly repudiated by the Church of which he is a minister, and that his book has since been withdrawn from circulation. But

cussion of that book now, though I shall refer to it again before I have done; but let me say, no man who makes a declaration of that sort can stop short with it. As he makes it other questions start up which demand to be answered. He has got rid of the difficulties of belief only to be confronted with the far graver difficulties of unbelief. Let me point out some of these now.

I

I begin with the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures": so Paul taught, and so in all ages the Church has believed. I allow readily that the belief is not free from difficulties; but if we reject it, the difficulties do not vanish; they rather increase. For, consider: *if Christ did not rise from the dead what did happen?*

Let us try to grasp the true position of affairs. Look at Christ's followers when He was laid in the tomb: is it possible to conceive a body of men more utterly broken, hopeless, and dispirited? Of the twelve disciples, one had

the wide publicity given to his views, both by the large sale of the book, and especially by the public discussions concerning it, fully warrant me, I think, in printing the address in its original form.

committed suicide, another with oaths and curses had denied that he knew his Lord, and the rest had forsaken Him and fled. Alike to them and to the Jewish authorities it must have seemed that the cause of Christ was buried with Him in His tomb. Turn now to the first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, and what do we find? Why, that within a few months, in the same city where Christ had died, these frightened disciples, with Peter at their head, were fearlessly declaring to the chief priests and the rulers, "God hath made both Lord and Christ this Jesus Whom ye crucified"; and not only so, but were winning converts to their faith by thousands. Go a few years further down the history, and we find that the new faith has established itself through all Palestine, in Asia Minor, and in Europe as far even as distant Rome.

What brought about the change? What transformed a handful of weak, despondent men and women into the conquering missionaries of a world? Their own testimony is unequivocal; let two speak for all. "This Jesus," said Peter, "did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses." "He appeared" [*i.e.* after the resurrection], says Paul, "to Cephas; then to the twelve; then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then He appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, He appeared to

me also." If this twofold testimony be received as true we have an adequate explanation of what follows; if we reject it the facts still remain, and some other explanation must be forthcoming.

Some of you will remember the Lectures delivered in this city a year or two ago by an eminent German thinker, Professor Pfleiderer. In these Lectures, which have since been issued in book form, the Professor denies the Resurrection, and endeavours to explain what in his judgment actually did take place. "The stricken disciples," he says, in substance—I quote Professor Orr's summing up—"after the first blow, pluck up courage and begin to think their Master is with them again. Then Peter has a vision—sees a bright light, or something of the sort, and fancies it is Jesus; and, by a mysterious telepathy, his faith affects the twelve, and they have visions; and the women have visions; and the five hundred brethren at once have visions; and last of all Paul has a vision. Out of these visions grew faith in the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Godhead, the Incarnation, the Atonement of Christ—the whole scheme of Christian theology." Now, Professor Pfleiderer is a man of great learning and ability. For any position that he takes up we may be quite sure he will say the best that can be said. But I confess that when I read his answer to the question, "If Christ did not rise from the dead, what did happen?" I felt as I had never felt before the unassailable strength of our

position. The miserable little ragged regiment, which was all that he could bring into the field, could not stand for five minutes against the onset of the serried ranks of the Christian argument.

The author of *The Saviour in the Newer Light* is apparently of Professor Pfleiderer's way of thinking; he also has no Easter Day in his calendar. How, then, does he account for what followed the alleged Resurrection? He makes no attempt to account for it at all. Mr. Robinson has done a very bold thing: he has written a life of Christ which not only ends with His burial, but which quietly ignores all that our only records of that life tell us of what happened after His return from the grave. "He went into the Beyond," says Mr. Robinson, "into which we all have to go"; but of any return from that "Beyond" there is not a word. "He went into the Beyond; and He left behind Him a number of 'apostles,' who for a short time became scattered in dismay, but soon rallied themselves." But the significance of this speedy "rallying" Mr. Robinson wholly misses. It meant nothing less than the beginning of the Christian Church, the opening of a new era. Surely there must have been something behind so momentous a spiritual fact. To say that the disciples, "scattered in dismay" by the death of Christ, "rallied themselves" is to trifle with us; reason demands some adequate explanation of a change so sudden and so mighty. Between these two things—the scattering and the rallying—

something there must have been; what was it? "The Resurrection of Christ from the dead," says the believer; "nothing," says the unbeliever, "nothing save the baseless delusion of a few weak men and women." So then the choice lies between the supernatural and the ridiculous; for my part, I prefer the supernatural.

II

A second difficulty which unbelief has to face is the belief of the first Christians concerning Christ.

And, fortunately, we are in a position to know with practical certainty what that belief, at least in broad outline, was. In the four greater Epistles of St. Paul—those, *i.e.* addressed to the Corinthians, the Romans, and the Galatians—we have four documents, written within thirty years of the death of Christ, whose genuineness Renan himself admitted to be "undisputed and indisputable." If, now, we examine these documents, what may we learn from them as to the thoughts of the first Christians concerning Christ? A New Testament scholar of equal candour and scholarship—Professor Sanday—summarizes the main points thus:—

1. Jesus was a divine Being—the Messiah of the Jews; and, at the same time, Son of God.

2. He came forth from God and became man,

having shared with God an existence prior to His Incarnation.

3. His career on earth was terminated by a violent death; but after being crucified, He rose again from the dead.

4 His Crucifixion, ignominious as it seemed, had nevertheless a far-reaching effect: in some mysterious way it operated to remove the guilt of human sin.

5. Though He had departed to the sphere from which He came, He would return once more as Judge of quick and dead.

But, it may be asked, granted that these were the beliefs of the man who wrote the letters, can we be sure that they were held in common by all the early Christians? We can; and for several reasons. We know that Paul, shortly after his conversion, joined himself to the other disciples in Jerusalem; and that, at a later time, he was by them of Antioch sent forth on his first missionary journey. Is it conceivable that either of these things should have happened had there been any serious divergence of opinion concerning the great facts which were the staple of the apostle's preaching? Furthermore, we have Paul's own definite statement that that which he preached was that which also he had received (1 Cor. xv. 3)—that is to say, which had been handed on to him as the common Christian tradition—and that it was identical with the faith that before he had persecuted (Gal. i. 23). So then, within thirty years

of the death of Christ, throughout all Palestine, in Galatia, in Corinth, and in Rome, Christian believers with one consent worshipped Christ as God. Controversies, bitter and strong, in the early Church we know there were, and they have left their marks in these Epistles. But of any controversy concerning the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ there is no trace, even the faintest.

The Gospel according to St. John might be put in as evidence also. This is the Gospel which Mr. Robinson loses no opportunity of disparaging. Any passage in which Christ claims for Himself more than superhuman dignity he attributes to the idealizing tendency of the writer of the Gospel. I cannot accept either Mr. Robinson's method or its results; but suppose it were so, could you have a more triumphant and final proof of that which I am now contending for—the universal belief of the first Christians in the Divinity of our Lord? Nor is this belief to be explained by any theories concerning the growth of myths and legendary stories. Myths do not spring up like mushrooms; they need time; and in this case the time cannot be found. For, as we have seen, the wide-spread existence of the belief can be traced back to within a few years of the Ascension. Once more, I ask, is there any explanation that does really explain the facts save this, that Christ actually was what the early Christians believed Him to be—the Son of God, the Saviour of the world?

III

The difficulties of unbelief do not end with the first century. There is the same consensus of opinion concerning Christ among Christians of all ages. Professor Pfleiderer—and apparently, also, Mr. Robinson—make Christ one in a row; right or wrong, that has never at any time been the faith of the Christian Church during the eighteen centuries of its existence.

The early Church, as every one knows, had its controversies concerning the Person of Christ; but, as Dr. Pope has clearly shown, these controversies were due not to any denial of the doctrine, but to one-sided and imperfect statements of it. "A Christ *only man*," he says, "was unknown until the third century, if indeed then." Further, as Mr. Gladstone pointed out a few years ago in his famous review of *Robert Elsmere*, since the fourth century our conception of Christ has remained practically unchanged. "In all ages," says a great German sceptic, "there has been one common mark of the Christian religion—belief in Christ." Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Salvation Army, and Methodists—we may agree about nothing else; we are absolutely one here. God knows I say it with no uncharitableness; but with all our easy toleration to-day there is not, I believe, an Evangelical Church in all Christendom that would not close the doors of its

ministry against any man whose confession of faith was contained in *The Saviour in the Newer Light.*

What are we to say to these things? Is this great testimony, stretching in an unbroken line from the days of the apostle Paul until now, one long repeated error? For eighteen centuries and more the Church has worshipped Jesus of Nazareth as Lord; must we now acknowledge that we have blundered, blundered not at the circumference merely, but at the very centre of our faith? and must we confess that only now, in the discovery that Jesus was a man of like passions with ourselves, the true light is beginning to shine? It is impossible; and yet it is to that very impossibility that unbelief is driven when it denies the Divinity of the Founder of the Christian faith.

IV

One other difficulty that unbelief has to reckon with I will name, and then I have done: the testimony of Christ's own consciousness. Even if we can conceive it possible for unbelief to explain away the belief of others concerning Christ, its heaviest task would still remain, viz. to explain Christ's belief concerning Himself.

Mr. Robinson essays the task with a light heart, and whatever else may be said for his method, at least it does not lack the merit of simplicity. He sets out with the assumption that the keynote of

Christ's character is His humility. Everything in the four Gospels that, in his judgment, accords with that he accepts as genuine; everything that does not accord with it—His claims to supernatural origin and power, and so forth—he rejects as the mistaken interpolation of an enthusiastic disciple. And inasmuch as it is in the fourth Gospel that these claims are most fully stated, that Gospel receives very scant consideration at his hands.

Now, of course, if you once adopt a method of that character, you have only to apply it skilfully and vigorously enough, and you may prove almost anything you wish. But if you do, please have at least a sufficient regard for the meaning of words not to call the process "criticism." But I am not anxious just now to discuss any methods of reading the New Testament, critical or otherwise; I want to point out that, however it be read, that even though you hack and hew at it with your "critical" penknives till little more be left of it than a heap of shreds and tatters, you cannot get rid of Christ's great and astonishing claims concerning Himself: the torn fragments still bear their testimony.

I mention but one fact only. From the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul, it is made abundantly clear that Christ Himself taught that He would one day return to the world to be its Judge. So overwhelming is the evidence on this point, that even Professor Pfleiderer does not attempt to controvert

it. Now, I put the question to you: Is it conceivable that any good man (such at least as all admit Jesus to have been), with a good man's consciousness of and sensitiveness to his own weakness and limitations, should arrogate to himself the right to be the judge and final arbiter of the destinies of mankind? To ask the question is to answer it; and we have to make our choice between these alternatives: either Christ spoke out of the depths of His own divine consciousness, knowing that the Father had committed all judgment unto the Son; or He made use of words and put forth claims which were, and which He must have known to have been empty, false, and blasphemous. For my part, again, I choose the former alternative; belief may have its difficulties, but they are as the small dust of the balance compared with the difficulties of unbelief.

The argument might be pursued to almost any length; but already, perhaps, I have said more than enough. Some of you, I know—and it is you I have had before me in preparing this address—will receive thankfully the word I have tried to speak. But I almost fear lest some of you should turn my poor arguments into excuses for delay in yielding yourselves to Christ. "There are still questions to be answered, and problems to be solved"; yes, and there always will be. But if we do not know everything, at least we know enough. Remember we have only one life; we

may waste it in idle speculating, but there will be no second for practice. After all we are not saved by syllogisms. I never expect to argue a man into faith in Christ. Argument may roll away the stone from the mouth of the grave; argument cannot bring the dead man back to life again. Now that I have spoken, let me stand aside and be still; and may all hear the voice of the Son of God and live!

THE BACKWATER OF LIFE

XVI

THE BACKWATER OF LIFE

"*The time of my departure is come.*"—2 TIM. iv. 6.

THESE are the words of a man who knows that his course is finished, that his work is done. This "Second Epistle to Timothy" is the last letter which we have from the Apostle's hand; and as he wrote it he knew the end was near. In the epistles that belong to the period of St. Paul's first captivity in Rome we find him more than once anticipating a speedy release. Thus he writes to Philemon: "Withal prepare me also a lodging: for I hope that through your prayers I shall be granted unto you." And so, as we know, it came to pass. Again, at a still later period, in the interval between his first and second imprisonment, he is busy with plans for the future. To Timothy, whom he had left in charge of the Church at Ephesus, he writes, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly." To Titus, who was in Crete, he sends instructions,

"When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, give diligence to come unto me to Nicopolis: for there I have determined to winter." Then suddenly the blow fell, and a second time the apostle was hurried away a captive to Rome.

It was during this second captivity that the letter before us was written. The change in Paul's circumstances and outlook is manifest in every line. He has no plans for the future now; there is no more word of a visit to Timothy or to Titus; nay, he urges Timothy to make all haste to come to see him—"before winter," he says; after that it may be too late. "Already I am being offered, and the time of my departure is come." At any moment the messenger may be at the door, and the servant summoned into the presence of his Lord.

Paul knew, I say, that his work was done. With a Nero on the throne little was to be expected from the hard clemency of Rome—at most a brief respite; a second release was impossible. Hitherto the strong man had girded himself, and walked whither he would; and now another was girding him and carrying him whether he willed or no. How will he bear himself now? Again and again we have heard the ring of his clear, unfaltering voice as he led the hosts of God into battle. With what voice will he speak, now that for him the fight is over, and the armour must be laid aside?

There is a brief essay of exquisite beauty,

known well to many of you, entitled "Ordered South," by Robert Louis Stevenson. I shall never forget the first time I came across it in a bundle of old magazines, which once in a sudden freak I had picked up in a saleroom. I was only a schoolboy at the time, caring a good deal more for cricket than for "style"; but somehow the subtle music of the words stole into my heart until it held me spellbound. The essay was written while Stevenson was quite a young man, and when ill health and our cruel northern winds had sent him flying south in search of a sunnier clime. It is full of the sad, pensive musings of one who feels his days closing in around him, and knows not if the next turn of the road may not bring him in sight of the end. "The world is disenchanted for him. He seems to himself to touch things with muffled hands, and to see them through a veil. His life becomes a palsied fumbling after notes that are silent when he has found and struck them."

How does *this* man, the servant of Jesus Christ, bear himself in these closing days? With what thoughts of the friends about him, of the years that lie behind, of the few fleeting days that still remain, and above all, of the great Beyond that is now so near to him?

I have been led to the choice of this subject through the reading of a very remarkable article which has recently appeared in the pages of the *Cornhill Magazine*, from the pen of its editor, Mr.

James Payn.[1] Mr. Payn has been for many years a familiar figure in literary circles, and his gay and genial wisdom has given delight to multitudes. But the keynote of this brief essay, to which I refer, is its sad and utter hopelessness: "It is a strange feeling," he writes, "to one who has been immersed in affairs, and as it were in the mid-stream of what we call Life, to find oneself in its Backwater, crippled and helpless, but still able to see through the osiers on the island between us what is passing along the river—the passenger vessels and the pleasure boats—and to hear faintly the voices and the laughter, and the strong language mellowed by distance from the slow-moving barges." Then he goes on to speak of the "bitter sense of humiliation at being reduced to dependence upon others." They on the Backwater do not "live," they only "exist." There is for him no happiness in the memory of his own happier past; he cannot sing with Dora Greenwell, "I turn unto the past when I have need of comfort"; rather he holds with the poet who tells us that "Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things"; none either in the contemplation of the happiness of others: all these things do but sharpen the contrast with his own misery—

> "Alas! we have nor hope nor health,
> Nor peace within nor calm around."

[1] Mr. Payn has resigned his editorship since this was written.

"There is one—one—consolation in our miserable lot," says Mr. Payn: "it has brought us face to face with the immeasurable goodness of Humanity."

I have referred to this article somewhat in detail, because it is to those in whose hearts its sad words awaken some answering echo that I want for a moment or two to speak. Usually such words as I am able to speak are to the young, to those whose life is before them, whose work is still waiting to be done, whose great decisions are yet to be formed. And I think it is right it should be so. But for once I turn from these to speak, as God shall help me, to those who are "in the Backwater," from whose hands the tasks of life have been taken, all unfinished as they are, for whom now nothing remains save to sit with empty, folded hands quietly waiting the end. It was only the other day, as I sat thinking on this subject, that a letter reached me from one of these who are no longer in the mid-stream of life; and I suppose there are many such in every congregation.

It is no wonder if such are sometimes sad. It is a testing day in a man's life when he comes to know what he has long secretly feared, that the prizes he has coveted and toiled for are not for him, that already he has done the best he is capable of, and that henceforth his influence will be within less and ever-lessening circles. "I must decrease," said the Baptist, and murmured not as

he said it; nevertheless, it is a hard saying. To see—as Christina Rossetti sings in her infinitely pathetic poem—

> "The dark hair changing to grey
> That hath now neither laurel nor bay,"

and to know that here, at least, we shall never be crowned; that we have reached the top of the road, and that henceforth all our steps must be downhill; that we can be no longer actors, but only spectators in a world that in a little while will go on its way without us at all—it needs great grace to know all this and not to grow hard and gloomy and bitter.

> "My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die!"

And perhaps there is nothing that some of us so much dread as the coming of the days whereof we shall say that we have no pleasure in them.

May it not help us if we listen to the last words of the Apostle Paul?

(1) And in the first place, in striking contrast with the sad hopelessness of what I read a moment ago, mark the apostle's quiet confidence and joy. It is not only that he does not murmur; he is not merely silently submissive; his patient waiting is far removed from numbed acquiescence.

His soul is stilled and at rest because it is abundantly satisfied. What royal words on a prisoner's lips, "I have all things and abound"!

"Youth," some one has said, "is a blunder, manhood a struggle, old age a regret." Paul might have called his youth a blunder, and his manhood a struggle, but his old age a regret—no! a thousand times no! Long ago it had been his desire that he might finish his course with joy; and now his prayer is being answered. The Apostle found his Beulah Land where Bunyan found his after him—on the hither side of the river as he drew near to the city: "Now, as they walked in this land, they had more rejoicing than in parts more remote from the kingdom to which they were bound."

(2) The Apostle's life-convictions remain with him still in unshaken strength. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ"—so he had written in the noontide of his day, and now that night is coming on apace, he repeats the great confession in this his last epistle: "For the which cause [*i.e.* because he was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the Gospel] I suffer also these things, *yet I am not ashamed*." How often as men grow old do they grow gloomy, and cynical, and pessimistic! They see no more visions, and dream no more dreams; they doubt even the dreams and visions that once they had. "God's *not* in His heaven," say they; "all's *wrong* with the world." And in the grave of their own

buried hopes they bury their hopes for the world. But Paul never doubted. He beheld Jesus, not indeed as yet with all things made subject unto Him; but he beheld Jesus, crowned with glory and honour; and the daily vision made him strong to do and to endure.

Nor are the old interests of his life dead and gone from him. He gives manifold directions to Timothy: "The clothes that I left at Troas with Carpus bring when thou comest, and the books, especially the parchments." One of God's children lay nigh unto death. "What shall I read you?" said a friend with his hand on the Bible. "Read me the newspaper," said the sick man, "let me know how it fares with the kingdom of God." "The books, and especially the parchments," writes the Apostle; he will let no creeping paralysis, born of the thought that that which had been could be for him no more, stay his hand from what it still found to do.

(3) Very beautiful also is Paul's attitude towards those who were near him in these last days. Mr. Payn speaks, in the article I quoted, of the "bitter sense of humiliation at being reduced to dependence upon others." But is that the true Christian spirit? Ought we not rather to cultivate a spirit of glad willingness to be ministered unto? We often say, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." But how are men to taste that blessedness if you and I will never humble ourselves to receive? There is, I suppose, in serving

sometimes a subtle sense of superiority which pleases us; but to submit to be served hurts our pride and we cannot bear it. But Paul has cast out utterly this unlovely temper. He who before had stood firm and strong as a granite pillar for others to lean upon, now puts out his hand to find some on whom he may lean. Twice he bids Timothy "do thy diligence to come shortly unto me." Timothy, Demas, Mark, Luke —he would have them all about him in these last days.

There is, too, if I mistake not, a new note of tenderness in Paul's voice. Every reader of his life and letters knows what fierce fires slumbered in his great soul, and how, at times, they would shoot forth in tongues of angry flame—against the tyranny of a Roman official or the injustice of a Jewish high-priest, against his brutal and shameless persecutors, and once even against a former companion and friend. But all that is past now. "Demas hath forsaken me," he writes to Timothy, "having loved this present world"; and we know how the treachery of desertion at a time like that must have stung the Apostle to the quick; but he says nothing. "Take Mark, and bring him with thee"; this is the man about whom he had had his quarrel with Barnabas; nevertheless, he bids Timothy "bring him with thee; for he is useful to me for ministering." "At my first defence," he says, "no one took my part, but all forsook me." Then his voice softens, and in

words that sound like an echo of a yet greater prayer he prays, "May it not be laid to their account!" Paul may never have read the words of his brother Apostle Peter, but he would have made them his own unhesitatingly: "The end of all things is at hand . . . *have fervent charity among yourselves.*"

(4) Need I say Paul did not fear to die? He had looked too often into death's dark face to be afraid of it now. Yet, after all, that is but a little thing to say. There are many to whom death is no longer "the shadow feared of man," who have not Paul's high hope. Some there are, indeed, who welcome death; it is for them the one door of escape from the unutterable pain and weariness of life. Paul welcomed death because he saw beyond death. "There is the Mainstream," writes Mr. Payn, "the Backwater and the Weir, and there ends the River of Life." What is after that he does not know; with him it is from death to dark. But with Paul it was from death to day. "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day. . . . The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto His heavenly kingdom." What are Nero's judgment seat and the executioner's flashing brand to the man who holds that faith?

"I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep." Many a time had he thrust that staff into the trembling hands

of the dying; many a time had he bid men lean upon it as they bowed themselves in the presence of their dead. And now that his own turn has come Paul does not fear to trust himself to it: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." So the martyr-apostle passed, to be, as he himself loved to put it, "at home with the Lord."

To Paul death was but as "the lifting of a latch;" to us, perhaps, who are young and strong, "the thought of death is terrible, having such hold on life." "Having the desire to depart and to be with Christ; for it is very far better"—so said the Apostle once; and so sometimes we persuade ourselves to say after him, all the time knowing that if we would be honest with ourselves, what we really desire is not to die, but to live. Yet let us make no mistake; it is no necessary mark of spirituality either to desire to die or to have no fear of death. When Paul wrote the familiar words I have quoted, he was no longer a young man, but "Paul the aged," and a prisoner. He did not speak thus twelve months after his conversion on the way to Damascus; but now he is tired and sick for home. Therefore let us not reproach ourselves needlessly.

But if our work is done, if we are in the back-

water and the end is near, God grant that in deepening peace and with ever-growing tenderness we may do the things that remain, till the soft mellow light of evening fade into that last darkness that brings the swift dawn of the eternal day!

"NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND"—
IS IT?

XVII

"NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND"—IS IT?[1]

"It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance."—HEB. vi. 6.

"IMPOSSIBLE"—and yet we say, it is "never too late to mend." Let us look into this matter for a few moments.

The subject has been down on my list to preach about for three or four years; but I have shrunk from it, and week after week have passed it by. You will not find it difficult to understand why. The preaching of doom is no light and easy task. But to-day necessity is laid upon me. After all, a preacher's business is not with what man thinks or what man likes, but with what God says; and if that doom is here, in the Word, we may not be silent about it. I do not speak as the champion of a doctrine, armed from head to foot

[1] I am indebted to Mr. Joseph Cook's *Boston Monday Lectures* for several suggestions and illustrations in this address.

with "proof-texts," eager for some paltry logical victory. Least of all would I be of those, of whom John Ruskin speaks, who, where they least know, will condemn first, and think to commend themselves to their Master by crawling up the steps of His judgment-throne to divide it with Him.

> "Let not this frail, unknowing hand
> Presume Thy bolts to throw,
> And hurl damnation round the land
> At those I deem Thy foe."

No; but if He who told us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life, also told us that men by their sin may make even of repentance an impossibility, must not the herald, whose one duty is with the King's message, make known the whole—this as well as that?

There is a good deal of thinking to-day—much of it very loose and very inexact, and some of it thrown into the form of definite, dogmatic propositions—which may be summed up in the familiar saying I have already quoted, "It is never too late to mend." A man, it is said, may wander far and sin grievously, he may fill up to overflowing the measure of his iniquity; nevertheless, God is good, His mercy endureth for ever, and at last—"far off," it may be, but at last—all will be well for all.

It is a comfortable and a comforting creed—if

one dare hold it. Will it bear looking at? Will it stand the test of examination? I do not think so.

"God is good; His mercy endureth for ever," —that, happily, needs no discussion; so far we are at one. For my part, I can put no limit to the mercy of God. I preach the unmerited, impartial, universal love of God. Nay, more, I cannot think that towards any that love can ever cease: "in the place we call hell eternal love as really is as in the place we call heaven."

But does universal love imply universal salvation? Is the love of God the only needed factor in the salvation of men? He "willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth;" but is God's will alone sufficient to secure that all men shall unfailingly be saved?

It is narrated of the eminent Swiss naturalist, Agassiz, that wishing to study the interior of an Alpine chasm, he allowed himself on one occasion to be lowered into a crevice in a glacier, and remained for some hours at mid-day at a point hundreds of feet below the surface of the ice. Then he gave his companions the signal to draw him up. But in their haste they had forgotten the weight of the rope. The weight of the basket, of the tacklings, of Agassiz himself, had all been calculated, but the rope had been forgotten; the three men at the summit were not strong enough to draw him back, and he had to remain suspended in the jaws of the chasm until one of the party went to seek for

assistance. When a man lets himself down into the depths of sin, saying to himself, "God is good, His mercy endureth for ever," and trusting to that to draw him up again, he is making a blunder not less fatal than the mistake of Agassiz might have proved: he is forgetting the consequences of sin upon himself. My sin cannot chill or change the love of God; but what if it so change *me* that all that love never stirs me, never touches me, never wakens within me one answering throb? I know of nothing in the nature or the will of God that can ever make impossible the salvation of any man; but what if that impossibility be created in the nature of man himself by that permanent and final dissimilarity of feeling with God which is sin's last and most terrible issue?

"Never too late to mend"?—look where I will, I can find confirmation of it nowhere: contradiction, refutation of it everywhere.

1. *It is not the doctrine of the New Testament.* And when I say the New Testament, I mean the whole of the New Testament. The author of a recent work on the life of Christ will not allow that Jesus said anything implying a future separation of mankind into two classes, and he manipulates the Gospel records accordingly. Everything that contradicts his preconceived theory he gets rid off by the convenient method of putting his pen through it. When a writer proceeds on that principle, it is trifling with us to talk of discovering the New Testament doctrine on the subject; what he dis-

covers is simply a dream of his own creation, with as much and as little authority as such dreams usually possess. But if we take all the words of the New Testament, and if we regard them as authoritative, then (if words have any meaning at all) there will be some of whom even at the last it will be true that it had been better for them if they had never been born. "Blessed is he who is not ashamed of Christ's sternest words." The New Testament is a much sterner book than some of us like to think. There are shadows here that will not flee. Christ spoke of "an eternal sin," of which, if a man be guilty, he "hath never forgiveness."[1] The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews declared of some that it was "impossible to renew them again unto repentance." St. Peter writes of men "having eyes full of an adulteress, *that cannot cease from sin*." St. John says, "There is a sin unto death," and then, though he had only just written, "this is the boldness which we have towards Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us," he goes on to say, "not concerning this do I say that a man should make request." And when we close the Book of Revelation, it is with these solemn words in our ears, "He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still." "You seem, sir," said some one to Dr. Johnson, in one of his despondent hours, when the fear of death and judgment lay heavy

[1] Mark iii. 29, R. V.

on him, "to forget the merits of our Redeemer." "Madam," said the honest old man, "I do not forget the merits of my Redeemer; but my Redeemer has said that He will set some on His right hand, and some on His left."[1]

Note not merely the "proof-texts," but the "proof-trend" (as some one has named it), not merely the "Biblical ripple," but "the Biblical gulf-stream;" and if you do that, you will neither yourself believe, nor teach others to believe, that it is "never too late to mend."

2. *Nature does not encourage us to believe that it is "never too late to mend."* A boat may careen to the right or to the left, and right itself again; but let it go beyond a certain line and it will capsize, and right itself no more. Gash a tree up to a certain point and kindly Nature will heal the wound; but go beyond that point, and the tree will wither and die. If it is a hundred steps from me to the edge of a precipice, I may take ninety-nine, and yet retrace them all; but if I take the hundredth step, there is no retracing that.

3. *What say the great students of human nature?* I take up Victor Hugo's great masterpiece, *Les Misérables*, and this is what I read when Bishop Myriel's goodness has opened to Jean Valjean a door of salvation: "He felt instinctively that this priest's forgiveness was the greatest and most formidable assault by which he had yet been shaken; that his hardening would become perma-

[1] Quoted in Denney's *Studies in Theology*.

nent if he resisted this clemency; that this time he must either conquer or be conquered, and that the struggle, a colossal and final struggle, had begun between his wickedness and that man's goodness."

Milton pictured Satan a free agent, and yet saying,

> "All good to me is lost;
> Evil, be thou my good."

Hear the guilty king in *Hamlet;* prayer is useless:

> "What then? What rests?
> Try what repentance can: what can it not?
> Yet what can it *when one can not repent?*
> O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
> O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,
> Art more engaged!"

And now beside your open Shakespeare lay these words from Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He is replying to those who say, "True, we are all sinners; but even in the Old Testament God has promised forgiveness on repentance." "True," he says, "God has promised pardon on penitence, but has He promised penitence on sin? He that repenteth shall be forgiven; but where is it said, He that sinneth shall repent?"

"It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "Amen!" says Samuel Taylor Coleridge. "Amen!" says your great Shakespeare.

4. And now, if from these we turn to some of

the awful facts in the life of men about us, will they bid us to hope that it is "never too late to mend"? I have read of an habitual drunkard who said, "If a glass of spirits were put before me, and I knew that the abyss was yawning between me and it, I must still take it." Dean Farrar says that a great living physician once told him how he was attending the deathbed of a rich man who seemed as if he could not die: with aimless and nervous restlessness his hands kept moving and opening and shutting over the counterpane. "What is the matter?" asked the physician. "I know," answered the son for his speechless father; "every night, before he went to sleep, my father liked to feel and handle some of his bank-notes." Then he slipped a £10 note into the old man's hand, and feeling, handling, and clutching it he died. Some years ago I cut out from the pages of the *British Weekly* this story concerning an eminent London clergyman, the Rev. Henry White of the Savoy Chapel. One night, many years ago, when Mr. White was a curate living at the East End of London, he was rung up in the dead of night, and urgently implored by a woman to come and see her husband, who, she said, was dying. Mr. White dressed and followed the woman to a squalid house in a court, where he found a man of about forty years of age, already within touch of the hand of death. He bent over the bed, talking to him, and offered to pray with him. As he spoke

he noted a sudden gleam in the man's eyes; still he went on talking of things past and things to come, and then, as the woman stood sobbing her heart out, he knelt and prayed. When he rose from his knees the man was dead, his fast stiffening fingers clasping the chain of the curate's watch. The man was a noted burglar and a life-long thief, and even as he was dying, the sight of a gold watch-chain in the possession of a pre-occupied man was too much for him, and as Mr. White prayed to God to forgive him his sin, the dying thief tried to pick his pocket. Professor Drummond—to mention but one fact more—addressing a meeting of students in Edinburgh, related this incident: A young man whose eyesight was suffering went to consult a London doctor. The doctor examined him, and saw in a moment that it was a case for plain speaking: "Young man," he said, "you are leading an immoral life; if you do not stop, in three months you will be blind." For a moment there was silence; then the young man moved slowly towards the window, and said in a low, hoarse whisper, "Good-bye, sweet world of light; I cannot give up my sin."

I do not want to make too much of stories of this kind; but when I take into account the whole facts, and above all when I remember that great moral law according to which character is always tending to become permanent, I dare not say, "It is never too late to mend." Sin may

become so ingrained into the very fibre of a man's being that, like a poisoned Nessus shirt, it can no more pass from him than existence. I have among my books one that bears upon its title-page the words "stereotyped edition." There had been several editions of the work before this one, in which the author had made various corrections and additions, but now the book had taken its final shape, and the edition was stereotyped. And up to a certain point a man may go on publishing a sort of revised edition of his life, expunging, correcting, adding—up to a certain point; but after that the "stereotyped edition" comes out, and then there are no more changes. "He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still." "Sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny."

Are you building on what men call "future probation," on a "second chance' in the life to come? But suppose you get your "chance"? God can only win men by His love; and if it fail here, what reason have we to think it will succeed there? If now every outgoing of divine grace avails nothing to shape our life according to the divine will, why should we expect that it will become suddenly effectual then? You will get another and a clearer revelation, you think; I do not know where it is to come from; but if you do, will you see it? will you love it?

will you be obedient unto it? Did you ever ponder this deep saying: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets"—if they follow not the light they have—"neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead"—though a greater light should shine upon them?

He who will not at last cannot. Ah, my brother! you may scoff at the doctrine of eternal punishment, you may put it aside as the discredited figment of an obsolete theology; but here is a great and solemn moral law, whose daily workings every man may behold for himself. Will you ignore it, and shut your eyes to it, and go on in the dark as if it were not?

Thank God! to-night we *can*—will you? will you? "Turn ye, for why will ye die?" Our destiny is in our own hands. God damns no man. If we are lost we are suicides.

"WILT THOU?"

XVIII

"WILT THOU?"

"*Wilt thou?*"—JOHN v. 6.

MY text is a very little one—two words, four letters each. But the longer I live, the more I am coming to see that it is these little words that carry the large meanings. Your sesquipedalian terminology, great showy words of many syllables — the dictionary is enough for them. They are only big, they are not great; there is no haunting mystery about them; the wise man can take them to pieces and put them together again, and tell you all about them in five minutes. But these great little words—life, light, love, home, God—your little child of two can say them, and your wise man of forty cannot tell you half that is in them.

Moreover, these words are Christ's words; and on His lips the word of large meaning has a larger meaning still. Let us dwell upon it for a time, and we shall find, I think, in this brief

question of my text one of those large and thought-provoking questions that Christ still puts to men.

"Wilt thou?"—read the question again as we find it in the Revised Version: "Wouldest thou?" That starts us thinking at once. This is the "will" not of futurity simply, but of volition: "dost thou will? is it thy purpose?" Already we are sighting larger meanings. This is no mere surface question; it goes to the roots of things. It is a question, not of the outer, but of the innermost life. "What," it asks, "is the bent of the spirit? what is the purpose of the heart? which way does the inward man look? what *wouldest* thou?"

That is the kind of question Christ always asks. He never dwells long among the things that are seen of men. He always takes deep views of life; "*that which is within*"—that is His concern. Hear how we judge, and then listen to Him. "How much is he worth?" we ask of some one. And then, for answer, we add up his rent-roll, we count his sovereigns at the bank. Now hear Christ. He tells us of a certain rich man who had barns great and many, and they were all full; but he had nothing else, and when at last the end comes, God writes his epitaph in big round letters — "Thou fool." "*So*," says Jesus, "so is every one that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." We pass our little shallow judgments on men and

things; we call this man good, and that man bad; this life we pronounce a failure, that a splendid success—but what is it we are judging? "The vulgar mass called work"—

> "Things done, that took the eye and had the price,
> O'er which from level stand,
> The low world laid its hand,
> Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice."

But Christ—how does He judge? Our words, does He heed them? He does. Our deeds, does He mark them? He does; but He does more than that. He asks not only "What dost thou say? what hast thou done?" but also, "What *wouldest* thou?" His word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword; it pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow; it is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart, and so—

> "All the world's coarse thumb,
> And finger failed to plumb,
> So passed in making up the main account;
> All instincts immature,
> All purposes unsure,
> That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount.
>
> "Thoughts hardly to be packed
> Into a narrow act,
> Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
> All I could never be,
> All men ignored in me
> *This* . . ."

I am worth to Christ. For He sees me not only as I am, but as I am seeking to be. His question is not, "What art thou?" but "What wilt thou?" He cares not for the endless babble of lips that say now this, now that—what does the heart say?

And is not Christ right? *Is* not this the really great question? Understand, I am not apologizing for those people who have a habit of doing all kind of nasty, ill-mannered things, and for whom their friends are always ready with the excuse, "Ah, well; but they are good at heart, you know, good at heart." People of that kind are something else "at heart" as well as good. No, I make no apology for such as these; nevertheless, I repeat, the great question is, What do we *will?* For that which we really *will*, sooner or later, we shall be. Did you ever ponder that deep saying of the Master: "Be it done unto thee even as thou wilt"? In the long run it is always so.

Let us turn for a moment, then, to some of the words of Christ, especially as we find them in the Revised Version, and let us see how much He makes—we may almost say, how He makes everything—to depend on *that which we will.*

(1) "*What will ye*," He said once, "*that I should do unto you?*" Did you ever think of it? His "doing" waits upon our "willing." Thanks be unto God, He has done many things that depended nothing at all upon our willing, else

had they never been done. It was not because we willed it that He left His Father's home of light; it was not because we willed it that He lived and suffered amongst men, and died at last at their cruel hands. His love sought not, for it needed not, any cause beyond itself; it waited no prompting from without; within itself it found its own cause and motive: He loved because He was love.

But now that love has thus shown itself to be love, it waits for our response. It cannot force its gifts, itself, upon us; that is never love's way. It will plead, and beseech, and entreat; but if still we sit, silent and sullen, love has no more that it can do. Christ bends over every one of us: "Wilt thou? my child. All good is mine, and mine to give to thee. Dost thou need it? Wilt thou seek it? Wilt thou take it?" And if to Him pleading, we answer "Yea, Lord," then, just as the pressing of an electric button sets all the machinery in motion; just as the pulling up of the dam sends the glad waters bounding and sparkling along the dried-up river bed, so our response sets free all His love to work its own great work within our hearts. But while we are silent, He is powerless; He can but stand and wait and plead, "What will ye that I should do unto you?" And until we *will*, He cannot *do*.

(2) "*If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.*" Once more the Revised Version is truer to the words of

Christ: "If any man *willeth* to do His will." What a gracious breadth of promise is here! The blessing is his, not only who does, but who only wills to do.

"If you desire faith, then you've faith enough;
What else seeks God? Nay, what else seek ourselves?"

Remember, attainment is not everything. Read over again the Beatitudes. Where do I come in? Which beatitude can I claim as my own? "Blessed are the meek"?—But I am proud and haughty. "Blessed are the merciful"?—But I am hard and unjust. "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake"?—But I have denied my Lord, and would not suffer for His sake. "Blessed are the pure in heart"?—But my heart, I dare not think of all that is hidden there! Then is there no word for me here? Hast thou not one blessing for me, O my Father? Let us read the great sayings again. "Blessed are they"—how runs it?—"*that hunger and thirst after righteousness.*" Ah! now I can put in my claim. If Thou, Lord, hadst said, "Blessed are the righteous," then had I no hope; but now dost Thou call him blessed who only desires with a great desire to be righteous. Yes, there are many things in Christ's reckoning besides "things done." He does, indeed, ask, "What hast thou done?" but this also is His question, "What wouldest thou?" There is more for the eye to see in the little shrub a foot above

the soil than in the tiny acorn-cup that will lie in the hollow of your hand. But Christ does not count the full-grown shrub higher than the growing seed; He has His eye on to-morrow and the day after.

And herein is there great hope for him who knows himself wrong, who knows to how little he has as yet attained, but whose whole being leaps forth in response to Christ's "Wilt thou?" There are, if I read my New Testament aright, at least two classes of sinners in God's sight. Here is one: to those Jews who went about seeking to kill Him, Jesus said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do—the lusts of your father *it is your will to do*" (for that is the true significance of the words); and where that is so, and as long as it is so, Christ Himself can do nothing. But there are many who, conscious as they are of the power of evil in their hearts, are not less conscious of a better self within them rising up in daily rebellion against the foe that enslaves them: most emphatically, the lusts of the devil is it *not* their will to do. Those words of the Apostle read like a page torn from the book of their own life: "The good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise. . . . I find then the law that to me who would do good evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into

captivity." Is that you, my brother? Is that fearful death-struggle yours? Then, in God's name, I bid you, do not despair. It is when knowingly we choose evil for our portion, when we say, "Evil, be thou my good," when our souls are wedded to it, it is then our case is desperate; for of that horrible incestuous union there can come forth naught but horrible death. But if, beaten and driven back as we are, our will yet sides with good, if we defy evil even while it enslaves us, if, when to the sin-stormed garrison of the soul, Christ calls, "Wouldest thou?" there is still one voice left to cry, "Lord, I would, I would; help Thou my weakness, and deliver me," then is our deliverance nigh at hand, and even from our poor lips Paul's shout of triumph shall burst forth: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

(3) But if in this teaching of Christ there is a tender graciousness, is there not also a lofty severity? Do not His words judge us, even as they bid us hope? Can we not feel the strands of the rope tightening in our hands? Let us take one more of His sayings—the question put to His disciples at that critical moment in their life when so many "went back and walked no more with Him:" "Will ye also go away?" or, as the Revised Version once again, with a finer perception of the true significance of the question, puts it, "Would ye also go away?"

It is, I think, as if the Master, turning de-

spondently from the faithless crowd, had said to the Twelve: "*We*, at least, *we* surely are not going to part? And yet, if your hearts be with them that are gone back, it were better so; for if the heart be recreant, it matters little that with your feet ye follow Me; so if ye *would*—go." It was not enough for Christ that they should stay by His side—where were their hearts? What *would* they?

Is not that a word that tests some of us? You are members of Christ's Church, but your hearts are not in His service. Religion is to you only a fetter that irks and frets you. If it were simply a question of what you "would," you would have gone back long ago, but something has kept you. Let me speak to you frankly: you had better go. The Church is not helping you, and you are hurting it. Be honest; go to your minister and tell him to strike your name off the church roll. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"; and if your "treasure" is not here, but otherwhere, do not offer to your Lord the worthless husk of a heartless service. "Would ye also go away?" It is to you He speaks this time—"would ye?" He is loth to let you go, and when you are gone He will weep great hot tears over you, but if you *would*, it were better so. Nay, I even think there will be more hope of you then than if you stay. One there was among the Twelve who heard His Master's word who should have gone; if he had,

some day, mayhap, he might have come back another man; but he stayed, and staying, betrayed his Lord.

These are examples sufficient, I think, to show how much, in Christ's thought, depends on what we will. One word more let me add. This question, "Wilt thou?" *is His question to us; it need never be ours to Him.* It is our willingness, never His, that is in doubt. "Lord," said one, "if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." "If Thou canst do anything," said another, "have compassion on us and help us." Oh, these trembling "ifs" of the seeking soul! Christ says to us "Wilt *thou?*" and here are we doubting, wondering if He will, if He is able. He can; He will; wilt *thou?* Listen to the wretched prodigal in the far country: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." Has not that often been our thought of God? We must do something to persuade Him to have mercy upon us, something to overcome His reluctance to receive us; "let me be thy hired servant—anything—so that I be not utterly shut out from Thy great pitying love." Now hear the Father Himself speak: "Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry:

for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found." My brother, have you found how hard is the way of the transgressor? One such, a young man, sat with me in my study but the other day; and in the bitterness of his soul it seemed to him that God had forgotten to be gracious. Is it so with you, too? Then will you read again the old, old words I have just quoted, and remember, as you read them, *this is what God says of Himself?* Bad as we are—bad with years of sinning, it may be—yet if we go to Him He will say even unto us, "My son!" Still Christ stands over us as He stood over the doomed city of Jerusalem, and still He says, "I would, I would;" and if He does not, why is it? There is ever but one answer: "Ye would not; ye would not." Then, wilt thou?

And if I will not, what? Then, as I have said, Christ can do nothing. "Wilt thou?"—all hinges upon that. Passions that rend and tear the soul, vices that grip it as with teeth of iron, habits ingrained into its very fibre—not one of these, nor all combined, can keep Him back from us. But if upon the heart's threshold the Will meet Him with its defiant "Nay," He cannot enter. Christ never passes over an "I will not" into our life.

> "Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours, to make them thine."

But if, instead, we stiffen our necks and harden our hearts, we bring to helplessness the very

Christ of God. And remember—I say it with trembling lips; I would leave it unsaid if I dare—this fixing of the will against Christ may become final, until the power to will with Christ itself is gone. All Scripture and all experience bear witness to this tremendous truth: he who will not, at last cannot.

"*To-day*, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." To-morrow, though He speak, you may not hear. Now! now! at this moment, yield to Him. Thirty years or so ago a lad of fifteen sat one Sunday night in a little Welsh chapel. As the preacher closed his sermon, he called upon all his hearers there and then to "submit to Christ." Then God opened that young lad's eyes; for weeks he had been seeking the way of peace, and now all at once he saw it all clear as the noonday; and sitting there among his school-fellows he bowed in submission to the will of Christ. And now to-day that lad's name is known through all our land, and multitudes thank God because thus in him He was pleased to reveal His Son. Will you submit to Christ? "While Peter yet spake these words"—so runs the ancient record—"the Holy Spirit fell." Pray that as I speak that same Holy Spirit may fall on us and lead us to the Saviour of the world.

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